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Hyflux plan could see heavy losses for investors

Beleaguered firm says investors and creditors would get less if it were to go into liquidation

Grace Leong and Seow Bei Yi
Business Correspondents

Hyflux has set out a reorganisation plan to keep the water treatment firm going but which could have investors suffering heavy losses.

The 34,000 registered holders of Hyflux perpetual securities and preference shares, who are owed \$900 million, will receive a total of \$27 million in cash and a 10.26 per cent share of the company.

Under its long-awaited restructuring plan, filed with the High Court yesterday, unsecured creditors who are not holders of perpetual securities and preference shares will receive 27 per cent of shares, and a total cash distribution of \$232 million.

The bulk of Hyflux's share capital, about 60 per cent, will go to SM Investments (SMI), a consortium of Indonesia's conglomerate Salim Group and energy giant Medco Group. SMI has agreed to invest \$530 million in the firm.

Of Hyflux's total debt amounting to almost \$3 billion, \$717 million is owed to unsecured bank creditors, while \$915 million is owed to unsecured contingent creditors and \$271 million to medium-term noteholders.

Chief executive Olivia Lum and the company's board members

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have offered to give up their entire stakes and entitlements as holders of preference shares and perpetual capital securities to all other holders of preference shares and perpetual capital securities once the plan is completed.

The company maintained that its medium-term noteholders and 29 bank creditors, and those who hold perpetual securities and preference shares, would get more under the proposed restructuring plan than if the firm were to go into liquidation.

Ms Lum said the proposed scheme aims to "revitalise its businesses" and allow the restructuring to take place in an orderly manner.

The plan needs to be approved by creditors, including perpetual securities and preference shareholders.

Then an extraordinary general meeting will be held for ordinary shareholders to approve the issue of new shares to SMI, where more than 50 per cent of them must vote "yes" for the issue of new shares to SMI and the waiver of a general offer.

A spokesman for Hyflux's financial adviser told reporters yesterday: "We appreciate that the outcome is very difficult, given the size of the potential losses, but this is the best option we have."

He said they were hopeful people would understand what was being offered as better than alternatives, which include liquidation.

Noting that no one else had made a better offer, he said the Salim-Medco consortium would make a good partner for Hyflux, with their extensive involvement in the water and energy sectors, and would bring their existing business connections and synergies to Hyflux.

Post-restructuring, he said, the company would be almost debt-free, have a stronger balance sheet and a strong strategic partner.

Its fortunes today are a far cry from what they were in 2001, when it became the first water treatment company to be listed in Singapore. Hyflux's profile in the global water industry grew, winning it contracts in China, India and the Middle East.

But analysts say Hyflux may have

Chas subsidy errors for 7,700 people corrected

About 7,700 people who applied for or renewed their Community Health Assist Scheme (Chas) cards in September and October last year received inaccurate healthcare subsidies due to a technical glitch.

The computer system had miscalculated the means-test results of these individuals, the Ministry of Health (MOH) said in a statement yesterday.

The means-test system calculates the amount of healthcare subsidies that individuals are eligible for based on their income information.

The MOH said the means-test and subsidy tiers for affected individuals had been corrected by yesterday. Those affected are not required to take any action.

About 1,300 individuals received lower subsidies and will have the difference reimbursed to them.

Another 6,400 individuals received higher subsidies but will not have to return anything.

Ms Lum said yesterday she and the board are "deeply aware of, and empathise with" stakeholders' unhappiness, and they had spent much time and effort to negotiate and secure a deal to save Hyflux.

In her affidavit, she said they would return their stakes to the pool to be distributed solely to the holders of perpetual securities and preference shares.

Ms Lum has a stake of 267 million Hyflux shares and securities; it represents about 34 per cent of the company's ordinary shares.

"In this way, it is my hope they may reap the future benefits which the Salim-Medco consortium deal can offer them," she said.

At least one investor is resigned to the deal. Preference shareholder Lee Wai Leong said: "Retail creditors have to accept that they may never get back 100 per cent of the principal even if the shares appreciate under Salim's watch. Banks have written off the loans. Retail preference and perpetual shareholders have to do the same. They have to let go."

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IT error led to wrong Chas subsidies for 7,700

Reimbursement for those who got less; those who got more will not need to return money

Ng Huiwen

About 7,700 people who applied for or renewed their Community Health Assist Scheme (Chas) cards in September and October last year received inaccurate healthcare subsidies due to a computer system error.

The 1,300 who received less than they should have will be reimbursed. The rest who received more subsidy than they qualified for will not have to return the money, said the Ministry of Health (MOH) yesterday, when it revealed how the computer system, administered by NCS, had miscalculated the means-test results.

The 7,700 make up about 17 per cent of people who made applications and renewals from Sept 18 to Oct 10 last year.

The bungle was due to an "isolated case of human error" said NCS, resulting in an incorrect version of a software being deployed during a system migration exercise.

The MOH said the means-test and subsidy tiers for the affected individuals were corrected by yesterday. Those affected are not required to take any action for now.

The total amount to be reimbursed is estimated to be \$400,000.

As for the other 6,400 individuals who received higher subsidies than they qualified for – estimated to be \$2 million – they would not have to return the money.

"MOH intends to recover from NCS the costs and expenses incurred as a result of this incident, as allowed for under our contract," the MOH said.

Individuals who are eligible for a Chas card of a higher subsidy tier



The amount to be reimbursed to the 1,300 who received less than they should have is estimated to be \$400,000. The other 6,400 individuals who received higher subsidies than they qualified for – estimated to be \$2 million – will not have to return the money. The MOH intends to recover from NCS the costs and expenses incurred. LIANHE ZAOBAO FILE PHOTO

can expect to receive the correct cards next month.

Those who should have received the orange Chas card but received a blue one due to the error can continue using it for the rest of the card's validity, which is for two years.

The blue card entitles its users to generally higher subsidies.

The means-test system calculates the healthcare subsidies that individuals are eligible for based on their income information.

Healthcare subsidies are means-tested so that those from lower-income households will receive greater financial support.

The MOH said that it first detected a discrepancy in the means-test results of a Chas card holder on Sept 24 last year.

The Chas processing team alerted NCS immediately, but the issue was initially attributed to intermittent network connection problems.

Between Oct 9 and Nov 2 last

year, five more cases were detected. A more thorough investigation was launched.

Out of the five, three were appeals made by individuals for a review of their Chas subsidy tier.

Last November, NCS traced the cause of the discrepancies to a software version issue on a server used by the means-test system.

This happened when the system was migrated to another government data centre last September.

Hence, the means-test results were computed without the requisite income information, the MOH said.

NCS also found that its deployment team had, in fact, fixed the software version issue earlier on Oct 10 last year, in response to an unrelated slow performance issue.

This prevented further cases of errors from happening, but failed to correct the means-test results that were compromised from Sept 18 to Oct 10.

NCS deputy chief executive Ng Kuo Pin said the firm has tightened its system deployment processes, including putting in additional safeguards to prevent any recurrence.

"As a vendor, we are accountable to MOH, our client, and we regret the error and inconvenience caused to our fellow Singaporeans," he said.

Since December, MOH has worked with NCS to establish the extent of the impact of the error.

It has also determined the correct subsidy tiers for each individual under the different services and schemes.

The MOH said that its final assessment was completed on Jan 14.

It will now work with grant scheme administrators and healthcare institutions to finalise the remedial action plans, including how affected individuals are to be informed and reimbursed.

Service providers and scheme administrators will progressively inform affected individuals and arrange reimbursements where applicable, with this process to be completed by the middle of next month.

The ministry said it takes a serious view of the incident and has worked with NCS on appropriate remedial measures. It will also work with NCS on measures to prevent such errors in the future.

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Additional reporting by Adrian Lim

HOW THE ERROR UNFOLDED

Sept 16, 2018: IT firm NCS, when migrating the means-test system, which calculates how much subsidy a patient gets, to another government data centre, uses the wrong version of a software file.

Sept 24: The first means-test discrepancy is detected by the Community Health Assist Scheme (Chas) processing team. It reports this to NCS, which begins investigations.

Oct 10: NCS team yet to pinpoint cause of the discrepancy. But it also investigates an unrelated slow performance issue, which is also due to the software version being wrong. The software version is fixed.

Oct 9 to Nov 2: Five more cases of inaccurate means-test results are detected. NCS confirms on Nov 29 this is down to the software version issue. While means testing operates correctly after the Oct 10 fix, results that were compromised from Sept 18 to Oct 10 have yet to be corrected. The Ministry of Health (MOH) is informed.

Nov 29 to Dec 5: MOH and NCS assess the impact of the errors and find that thousands of individuals are affected.

Jan 14, 2019: The correct subsidy tiers are given to MOH.

Jan 18: MOH and NCS correct the means-test results for individuals whose incorrect records have not been used by non-Chas schemes. This helps to contain the impact.

Feb 10: The number of unique individuals is determined.

Feb 16: Correct subsidy levels for all affected individuals are restored. The authorities begin contacting those affected, and arrange for reimbursements. SOURCE: MOH, NCS

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Hyflux can gain up to \$258m working capital

Decision lies with investors voting on deal that will see 60% of firm's share capital going to consortium

Grace Leong
Business Correspondent

A proposed restructuring exercise would give water treatment firm Hyflux a reboot that could gain it up to \$258 million in working capital.

But its fate lies in the hands of investors and if they will vote in favour of the proposed deal, which will see the bulk of Hyflux's share capital, 60 per cent, going to SM Investments (SMI), a consortium of Indonesia's Salim Group and energy giant Medco Group.

The consortium has agreed to invest \$530 million in the company.

Under the restructuring plan, Hyflux perpetual securities and preference shareholders, who are owed \$900 million, will get back about \$71.4 million in both cash and equity value, while unsecured bank creditors and note holders, who are owed around \$1.67 billion, will get about \$164.1 million in both cash and equity value, a company spokesman told The Sunday Times.

In comparison, liquidation would leave perpetual securities and preference shareholders with nothing, while unsecured bank creditors and note holders would stand to recover either 3.8 per cent of their total claims amounting to \$74.5 million in the worst-case scenario, or 8.7 per cent of their claims amounting to \$170.8 million in the best-case scenario, she said.

Some retail investors have called the proposal unfair in its distribution of cash and equity, claiming their voices were not represented adequately in the negotiations among Hyflux, SMI and the unsecured creditors.

One said she had sunk almost half of her retirement savings in Hyflux preference shares and perpetual securities, but retail investors like her were not engaged in the reorganisation process.

But among those willing to give it consideration was another preference shareholder, Mr Lee Wai Leong, who thought it was reasonable.

"Better than I expected originally," he said, "principally because Olivia and the board threw in all their shares to give more for distribution."

Chief executive Olivia Lum and the company's board members have offered to give up their entire stakes and entitlements. Ms Lum has a stake of 267 million shares and securities, representing about 34 per cent of the company's ordinary shares.

Whether the deal is fair or not is a difficult question, he added. "Some people think the shares are worthless. I would ask them to think again. Why would Salim pay for 60 per cent of worthless shares?"

"The shares are going to be worth a lot more in the long run, though they will not pay dividends for quite some time, and may crash in the short term."

Mr Lee said he was confident the company could survive another five to 10 years with a successful takeover by the consortium, which would not want to see its investment fail.

Under the proposed deal, the stakeholders including the banks would "prefer if Hyflux's projects, including the Tuaspring plant, remain under Hyflux", a spokesman for the company's financial adviser said.

The \$1 billion integrated water and power plant located in Tuas marked Hyflux's first foray into the energy business, but struggled to turn a profit.

"One of the conditions of the Salim deal is that they are investing in the Hyflux group with Tuaspring as part of the deal," said the spokesman. "Tuaspring's secured creditor Maybank knows that SMI wants to keep Tuaspring. So there will need to be discussions between Maybank and Salim-Medco to ensure there is an agreed way of working together going forward."

Last week, the Securities Investors Association (Singapore) raised questions regarding Hyflux, including about Ms Lum's large remuneration while the firm racked up debt and losses due to "faults and defects" in its assets.

In a letter on behalf of the company's shareholders, Sias said Ms Lum received over \$60 million in dividends "in the time that shareholders and bond holders have seen their entire investment destroyed", and that in 2017, when Hyflux reported losses of \$115.6 million, Ms Lum received between \$750,000 and \$1 million in salary, benefits and bonuses.

Asked if management would take pay cuts given Hyflux's financial difficulties, the spokesman said she could not give an answer at this point.

She also declined to comment on Ms Lum's role should the Salim-Medco deal go through. "Ms Lum wants to make sure the restructuring scheme transitions smoothly first, then discussion of her future will take place," she said.

For the trade creditors of Hyflux's subsidiaries, \$13 million will be set aside to satisfy all the claims against Hydrochem, Hyflux Engineering and Hyflux Membrane Manufacturing. The company and its three subsidiaries have applied to the High Court to meet all creditors to vote on a compromise or arrangement.

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Highs and lows

1989
Ms Olivia Lum incorporates Hydrochem and begins operations with two employees.

2000
Hyflux is incorporated on March 31 and Hydrochem becomes its wholly owned subsidiary. On Dec 20, Hyflux is converted to a public limited company - the first water treatment company to be listed in Singapore.

2001
Hyflux is awarded its first municipal water treatment project in Singapore to supply and install the process equipment for the Bedok Newater Plant, the country's first Newater plant.

January 2003
Hyflux is named the preferred bidder by PUB to build, own and operate Singapore's first seawater reverse osmosis desalination plant - SingSpring.

April 2011
The group secures Singapore's second and largest seawater desalination project and proposes to incorporate an on-site 411MW combined cycle power plant to produce electricity for Tuaspring Integrated Water and Power Project. The power plant becomes fully operational in 2016.



June
Hyflux chairman and group CEO Olivia Lum becomes the first Singaporean and the first woman to win the prestigious Ernst & Young World Entrepreneur of the Year.

Feb 27, 2018
Hyflux posts its first full-year net loss since listing of \$116.4 million for FY2017, due to weak electricity prices. Tuaspring registers net loss of \$81.9 million for FY2017.

May
Hyflux suspends trading of its shares and related securities and starts a court-supervised reorganisation process.

October
Maybank, Hyflux's largest secured lender, gives the firm until Oct 15, 2018 to find a buyer for Tuaspring. The deadline has since been extended till end-February. The proceeds will be used to pay 29 lenders and other creditors.

Oct 18
Hyflux announces it has entered a restructuring agreement with a consortium between Salim Group and Medco Group. The consortium agrees to give Hyflux a \$400 million equity injection, in exchange for a 60 per cent stake. It also grants Hyflux a shareholder's loan of \$130 million and a debtor-in-possession loan of \$30 million to help finance it through the restructuring.



November
The High Court extends the debt moratorium for Hyflux to end-April.

Feb 11, 2019
The Securities Investors Association (Singapore) raises more than 30 questions to Hyflux's board and advisers, including whether Ms Lum will have a role in Hyflux after its restructuring and why she is not contributing her gains from the company to this process.

Feb 15
In a letter to the Singapore Exchange, Ms Lum says she is "deeply saddened" over the "pain and loss" suffered by those who invested in or lent money to the now-insolvent company.

Feb 16
Hyflux releases a proposed restructuring plan to creditors.

Source: HYFLUX PHOTOS: HYFLUX, LIANHE ZAOBAO SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

Hyflux's restructuring plan

	Shares in Hyflux after reorganisation	Total cash distribution
SM Investments*	60%	—
Unsecured creditors	27%	\$232m
Holders of debt securities schemes (perpetual securities and preference shares)	10.26%	\$27m
Ordinary shareholders	2.74%**	—
Trade creditors of Hyflux subsidiaries (Hydrochem, Hyflux Engineering and Hyflux Membrane Manufacturing)	—	\$13m

NOTE: *A consortium comprising entities from the Salim Group and the Medco Group

**Adjusted down from 4% to account for shares contributed by Hyflux directors to holders of debt securities schemes

Source: HYFLUX SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS



By 2005, Ms Olivia Lum had a net worth of over US\$240 million, which earned her a place as the only woman on Forbes' South-east Asia Rich List. PHOTO: FORBES



Ms Lum in a 2001 photo. That year, Hyflux launched its initial public offering on the Singapore Exchange's Sesdaq board. The stock rocketed, climbing 131 per cent. ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

4 things about Hyflux CEO

Olivia Lum: From abandoned child to multimillionaire

1 SMALL-TOWN GIRL

Born in a small town called Kampar in Perak, she was abandoned at birth and brought up by an illiterate Chinese woman.

In 1977, the gutsy 16-year-old moved to Singapore and later secured a place in Hwa Chong Junior College.

But her young life took a turn for the worse when her grandmother fell ill and was hospitalised for nearly a year.

While sitting her A-level examinations, her grandmother died. Despite the tragedy, she clinched a spot to study chemistry at the National University of Singapore.

2 A NOSE FOR BUSINESS

When she moved here, she covered school fees and paid the rent by giving tuition. She even bought a motorcycle to travel faster to her students' homes.

On weekends, she worked as a promoter in department stores, peddling anything from cosmetics to smoke detectors.

Before entering university, she sold insurance, cosmetics, flower pots and souvenirs, among other things. With the profits, she struck up a partnership to run a canteen at construction sites - first in Katong, and then in Bukit Timah.

3 TAKING THE PLUNGE

After graduation, she joined industry giant Glaxo Pharmaceuticals as a chemist. The job allowed her to buy a condominium in Bayshore within months for just about \$210,000 with no down payment.

After three years at Glaxo, she took the plunge. She raised funds by selling her condo unit for a profit, paid off her car loan and moved into a rented HDB flat.

And so at 28, Ms Lum set up her own business, Hydrochem, to sell water treatment products and systems.

She pooled together \$20,000 in starting capital, which she used to set up shop in a cramped office in Tampines Industrial Park with one clerk and one technician.

Since firms in Singapore did not

TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE

Almost every weekend, I would ride my bike up to the hospital in KL. Sometimes, when I felt too tired, I took a train or night bus. It was traumatic.

MSOLIVIA LUM, on having to travel to visit her foster grandmother, who was ill when she was in junior college.

AMBITIOUS

I always knew I would make it big.

MSLUM, in a 2001 interview.

want the risk of dealing with someone new and unknown, she turned her attention to Malaysia and Indonesia.

4 FORBES LIST

In January 2001, on her 40th birthday, Hyflux launched its initial public offering on the Singapore Exchange's Sesdaq board. The stock rocketed, climbing 131 per cent.

Her clients included multinational companies such as STMicroelectronics, Hitachi Chemical Asia-Pacific, Sanyo Air-Conditioners Manufacturing, and even Jurong Bird Park.

That same year, her firm also won the tender to supply and install equipment for the country's first Newater plant.

In 2001, she became a Nominated Member of Parliament, and in 2003, she won Her World magazine's Woman Of The Year award.

By 2005, she had a net worth of over US\$240 million, which earned her a place as the only woman on Forbes' South-east Asia Rich List. She was also ranked 17th in Forbes magazine's first Singapore rich list in 2006, and Forbes list of Asia's top 50 businesswomen in 2012.



SCAN TO WATCH

Six things about the embattled Hyflux CEO's life.



http://str.sg/oEW5

Order only what you can finish

NEA takes on problem of rising food waste with campaign at hawker centres

Fabian Koh

With food waste among the five largest sources of waste in Singapore, the National Environment Agency (NEA) hopes to get people to adopt three habits when eating out so as to combat wastage.

The year-long drive, part of the Year Towards Zero Waste campaign, was launched by Senior Minister of State for the Environment and Water Resources Amy Khor at

Yishun Park Hawker Centre yesterday.

It encourages people to order only what they can finish; ask for less rice or noodles if they are unable to eat that much; and say “no” to side dishes they will not consume.

NEA will be reaching out to people at 25 hawker centres and at partner organisations such as Sheng Siong supermarket group and Prime Supermarket. It will also spread the message at schools and institutes of

higher learning. Last year, more than 150 schools organised food-waste reduction activities.

Dr Khor said that outreach efforts will be conducted at hawker centres, which are one of the most popular eating spots for Singaporeans.

“Actually there are also benefits in terms of eating more healthily, because you don’t overeat. Usually if you don’t want to waste, then you just eat everything up. Also, it is good on the pocket, because you can save money if you don’t overorder,” she said.

Apart from efforts on the ground, there will also be publicity on digital platforms, with a Web series featuring public figures incorporating



The year-long drive will encourage people to order only what they can finish; ask for less rice or noodles if they are unable to eat that much; and to say “no” to side dishes they will not consume. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

food-waste reduction practices into their daily lives, to inspire viewers to do the same.

NEA chief executive Tan Meng Dui said: “Singaporeans love their food, yet food waste is the second-

largest waste stream to be disposed of. There is clearly more we can and should do together...

“We would like to create a pervasive culture where everyone will have an instinct to ‘buy, order and

cook just enough’, encourage their friends and family to do the same, and even influence the practices and behaviours at their workplaces towards reducing food waste.”

In Singapore, food waste has risen 40 per cent over the past 10 years, from 568,000 tonnes disposed of by households and the food industry in 2008 to around 809,800 tonnes in 2017. This made up 23 per cent of total waste disposed of in Singapore in 2017, with only 16 per cent recycled.

An MP for Nee Soon GRC, Ms Lee Bee Wah, who is chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for the Environment and Water Resources, called the anti-food waste campaign “timely”.

“I remember when I was young, my mum used to tell us, ‘don’t waste food, there are still people in this world who do not have food’. And this advice is still valid,” she said.

She added that with the creeping effects of climate change, more Singaporeans have ambitions of saving the earth, and this latest campaign also works towards that.

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Trials of a postal system



Top: Mr Rajab Abu Noh, 65, who has been a postman for 43 years, begins his workday sorting out mail carefully according to block followed by unit numbers into the sorting frame to prepare for delivery. Any error would result in delays along his route. Above: A colleague gives Mr Rajab a shoulder rub while waiting for the morning briefing after two hours of mail sorting. ST PHOTOS: CHONG JUN LIANG

Two slices of bread and a toilet break between 12 hours of work

That is the gruelling pace of a postman as **The Sunday Times** follows him on his rounds. SingPost delivers three million mail items daily, which works out to 3,000 pieces by each of the 1,000 postmen.



Mr Rajab and his colleagues gathering for a 9am meeting before they go out on their delivery rounds.



Janice Tai
Social Affairs Correspondent

Mr Rajab Abu Noh has been a postman for 43 years. He started as a 22-year-old, weaving among kampung huts and farms on a motorbike, avoiding chickens.

Today, at the age of 65, he wields a smartphone and navigates high-rise buildings while dodging dogs. It remains a tough – if not even tougher – slog, given the drastically changed nature of mail delivery, as Singaporeans fall in love with the convenience of online shopping.

SingPost, the national postal service provider, seems hard-put to keep pace with the developments. On Feb 7, it was fined \$100,000 for failing to meet standards on the delivery of basic letters and registered mail here over six months in 2017. It comes after a string of delivery lapses, such as a postman being arrested for mail found discarded.

SingPost has since vowed to lighten its postmen's workload and review their pay, among other measures, to improve service quality.

To better understand how such service lapses could have occurred and the gruelling pace that postmen undergo, *The Sunday Times* followed Mr Rajab around as he goes about a usual workday.

FUEL FOR A DAY'S WORK

It is 6.30am on a Wednesday, and he is at the sorting area at Serangoon North Regional Delivery Base, one of seven across the island.

He scarfs down his breakfast – two slices of bread with butter and kaya and a cup of coffee. That would have to fuel him through the next 12 hours of work as he opts not to stop for lunch. Save for a 10-minute trip to the toilet at 3pm, he takes no breaks.

Mr Rajab's daily route takes him through 38 condo blocks of about 1,750 residential units in the Yio Chu Kang/Sengkang area.

At 7.30am, he begins to carefully sort the mail according to the floors in their respective blocks. Any error means he will later have to double back to the correct block or level during delivery.

At 9am, the postmen gather for a briefing. The inspector of post reminds them of complaints about missed deliveries or articles damaged when the bulky items were squeezed into letter boxes.

He tells them to report back if letter boxes are full so that residents can be reminded – by slipping notices under their door – to clear them. He also reprimands the postmen for leaving the master lock for letter boxes unlocked in four in-

stances in one neighbourhood.

The meeting ends. Mr Rajab looks at the mountain of mail – a mix of letters and packages – piled high in a trolley and quickens his pace.

There is no way he can put it all into the storage box on his three-wheeler scooter without its heavy weight affecting his balance. So he takes half of it and will collect the rest later at a SingPost storeroom at an HDB block along his route. He departs the base at 11am.

MOUNTAIN OF MAIL

SingPost has to deliver three million mail items daily. With a fleet of 1,000, this works out to 3,000 pieces for each postman.

However, 350 out of the 1,000 delivery persons are part-timers, mostly housewives and retirees.

There are no fixed hours: a postman has to deliver his mail load for the day, which varies, before he can knock off. Each usually delivers mail to some 20 blocks in an area.

In the past, this volume of mail might still have been manageable, given that they were mainly letters that could be shoved quickly into letter boxes. A postman made an average of only 20 to 25 doorstep deliveries of packages a day in 2010.

Now, such doorstep deliveries have doubled for non-peak periods and can go up to 50 or 60 during the year-end peak season.

This means Mr Rajab works from 7.30am to about 6pm every day, or up to 8pm if overtime work – for which he is paid extra – is needed.

In the past, he could have called it a day at about 3pm.

Despite such time pressures, he says no postman should have to resort to dumping mail to cope with their schedules or vent frustration.

SingPost says it intends to alleviate their load by hiring 100 more postmen as a short-term measure.

Four hours after he starts work, at about 11.30am, Mr Rajab arrives at his first port of call, a condominium in Yio Chu Kang. He has to deliver letters to 13 blocks there.

At the bottom of a block, Mr Rajab whips out a Samsung Galaxy A4 smartphone.

Since January, all postmen are issued smartphones loaded with SingPost's Smartpost app. It is meant to assist the postman as well as ensure he delivers mail in a timely and appropriate manner.

Mr Rajab uses it to scan a Near-Field Communication (NFC) tag mounted on the wall next to the centralised area of letter boxes. This is for the postman to clock his time of arrival and departure.

He then proceeds to slot mail and advertisements into the letter boxes. Registered articles, and regu-

lar mail that cannot fit into the letter boxes, have to be taken to the doorsteps of the residents.

He goes up to a residential unit, rings the doorbell twice, knocks on the door and calls out "Postman". There is no response.

So Mr Rajab opens the app on his phone and scans the barcode on the registered mail. Once the code is detected, a countdown timer of 45 seconds is activated to ensure that the postman waits for a sufficient amount of time at the door.

After 45 seconds, the smartphone screen switches to camera mode for the postman to take a photo of the unit number as proof that he had attempted delivery. Then Mr Rajab notes down the time on the delivery notice, and slots it in a crevice in the door.

"No luck this time, no one in," he mutters under his breath.

Contrary to the perception that postmen prefer to just leave a failed delivery notice at the door and scoot off quickly, it actually takes him twice as long to complete all the steps to log a failed delivery on the smartphone system, compared with if the recipient was home.

The ST times Mr Rajab, and finds that he has to spend about two minutes outside the door to complete the process if a person is not home. If someone is at home, it takes just one minute. "I know doing all these can protect us from complaints from customers but sometimes technology can also be a waste of time," says Mr Rajab.

For instance, the app at times cannot detect the barcode even after multiple tries and he ends up having to manually key in the barcode number. This happens at least three times throughout the day.

DELAYS AND BOTTLENECK

At 3.20pm, Mr Rajab finishes at a second condo, and the box at the back of his scooter is finally empty.

But he is not done. He heads over to a nearby mail storeroom to collect his second batch of mail for two more condominiums. This means another bottleneck as the mail has not arrived from the base. It takes half an hour. The time ticks by.

At 5.00pm, he completes all his deliveries. By then, he would have covered 38 blocks for the day, including some landed properties. He heads back to the Serangoon North base to return undelivered mail as well as returned mail.

He changes out of his blue uniform at 6.30pm, some 12 hours after he started his day there.

OLDER POSTMEN, LOWER PAY

After working for 43 years, Mr Rajab's basic salary is about \$1,800.



Mr Rajab carting his mail (above) to his vehicle – but this is only half of his full load for the day, which won't fit into the storage box on his three-wheeler scooter (left). He has to collect the rest later from a SingPost storeroom at an HDB block along his route.



Bulky items that cannot go into the letter box and registered mail take longer to deal with – especially when no one is home.

A day in the life of a postman



<http://str.sg/postman>

He works five days a week.

It is a big jump from the \$300 he earned when starting out in 1976, but still below Singapore's median gross income of \$4,400, which includes employer contributions to the Central Provident Fund.

It is thus perhaps unsurprising that of the 650 full-time postmen, just half are Singaporeans. The rest are work permit holders from countries such as China and Malaysia. The average postman is older than the average Singapore worker – 51, versus 43 years old.

SingPost says its entry-level full-time postmen draw a basic salary of \$1,600 a month. It is now reviewing salaries and career progression as part of a larger review of mail operations. "The pay is not enough and it needs to go up for more people to join. The work looks easy but it is very tough and only fit people can do this," says Mr Rajab, who walks with a limp.

Years on the job have partly worn out his knees and he has done a knee replacement surgery on his left leg and is due for another surgery for his right knee soon.

Three weeks ago, he was bitten by a large bulldog because the door was open and the dog was not leashed when he was delivering a registered article to the resident. He had to go for a vaccine injection.

He had worked in a few contractor jobs after leaving Geylang Serai Vocational School but those jobs did not last long. He then joined SingPost, going for a stable job with medical and other benefits.

Today, Mr Rajab is one of the oldest and longest-serving postmen. He still enjoys what he does. "No enjoy, no work 43 years," says Mr Rajab simply.

His wife is a housewife, and they have three children.

The cheery and self-composed man chokes up when describing what makes his day.

"It is when residents say: 'Hello Mr Postman, long time no see' and I will answer: 'Every day I will come and I can see you'," he says.

His only son also works in the delivery line, but as a courier. "I think he finds being a postman embarrassing and courier jobs are more popular with young people today," says Mr Rajab, who also has two daughters and one grandson.

He says that he has no plans to retire, even though his children are all working and can support him.

"I want to work as long as is possible. I don't want to retire, stay home and just makan (eat) and grow a belly," he says with a guffaw, gesturing wildly at his stomach.

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Larger letter boxes explored to tackle e-commerce surge

Tiffany Fumiko Tay

Larger letter boxes to accommodate growing e-commerce volumes and accountability for non-trackable items are among the mail solutions that SingPost is exploring for the future, its group chief executive Paul Coutts has told *The Sunday Times*.

SingPost is in discussions with the authorities and stakeholders on increasing the size of both letter boxes and their slots to ensure that the infrastructure keeps pace with the boom in e-commerce, Mr Coutts, 62, said.

"If a customer orders four to five packages and they arrive on the same day, trying to get those in a letter box can be quite difficult," he noted in a recent interview.

Under current guidelines set by the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), which administers the Postal Services Act, the minimum internal dimensions of units in a residential letter box nest are 110mm by 270mm by 380mm.

The maximum dimensions for packages that can be sent through the mail, however, are 240mm by 340mm by 70mm, an international standard set by the Universal Postal Union, a United Nations agency.

This means that mail items sent through the postal service may be larger than the letter box. In situations where items are too large for the letter boxes or cannot fit because the boxes are cluttered with uncleared mail, they are sent for doorstep delivery.

Speaking in Parliament last Monday, Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information Sim Ann said that SingPost delivers 38,000 items a day that cannot fit into letter boxes and its postmen now conduct more doorstep deliveries for parcels.

Apart from easing some of the postmen's load, another area that SingPost is looking at is providing accountability for items that do not have tracing, such as basic letters.

"Our group IT team is having an exploratory discussion with a couple of providers to see how we can do that," said Mr Coutts, who added that this may take some time.

For the year ahead, rebuilding the trust that SingPost has lost after a string of high-profile service failures is its top priority, he said.

The postmen involved in recent incidents have been disciplined and in some cases sacked, while measures to improve service quality are being rolled out amid a larger review of the organisation's infrastructure and processes.

From the arrest of one of its postmen last month, after undelivered mail was found discarded, to complaints about feeble home delivery attempts, to a \$100,000 fine handed down by the authorities on Feb 7 for failing to meet government service standards in 2017, it has been a rough couple of months for SingPost.

While SingPost pointed to the growth in e-commerce as the main reason for its recent service failures, critics say that delivery issues have existed for years, and accuse the postal service provider of taking its eye off its core mail busi-

ness, a charge that Mr Coutts denies.

"I don't think that we've neglected Singapore... the pain points that we're experiencing today are some of the same ones that other postal organisations have gone through in their own home markets as they've gone global over the last 10 years or so."

Over recent months, Singapore has seen a "very sudden and extreme surge in e-commerce volumes coming through", which exposed weaknesses in SingPost's infrastructure and processes, he said.

In planning for the peak season, SingPost conducted research and had discussions with major customers such as Lazada.

"We were looking at somewhere around a 15 per cent projected volume increase. In reality we experienced a 30 per cent increase, so it was double what was expected," he said.

At the current pace of growth, the volume handled over the peak season is expected to become the norm in six months, "so we need to be set up to be able to handle that", said Mr Coutts, who joined SingPost in June 2017.

The surge has also uncovered gaps in customer service, for example.

"At times when they (customers) reach out to our contact centre, we come across as not being as empathetic and proactive in resolving that customer's issue as we should be," said Mr Coutts.

To address this, it will provide training for its staff, while the role and responsibilities of its postmen will also be re-evaluated as the group invests more in technology.

This will be done as part of a broader salary structure review to enhance their remuneration. The starting pay for a postman is about \$1,600 a month, excluding other incentives.

Hiring an additional 100 postmen is one of the immediate measures SingPost has announced to improve service levels, and it is seeking more locals and young people, said Mr Coutts.

While the furore caused by the postal service provider's lapses has begun to die down, the Government has said that further regulatory action from the IMDA can be expected as it reviews SingPost's letter delivery performance for last year, investigates infringements under the Postal Services Act and considers extra regulatory standards.

SingPost is required to submit quarterly reports of its performance on several indicators for the delivery of local basic mail, which fell below standards in nine instances in 2017, earning it its highest fine to date.

Mr Coutts declined to comment on last year's performance, citing the ongoing evaluation.

Neither would he be drawn into pinpointing the cause of the issues in 2017, or any systemic problems with the organisation that may have led to the recent spate of incidents.

"We've clearly let the public down, we've let ourselves down, and for that we apologise," he said.

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38k

Number of items handled by SingPost postmen every day that cannot fit into letter boxes, forcing them to make doorstep deliveries.



30%

Increase in e-commerce volume during the peak season. The firm had anticipated only a 15 per cent increase.



PHOTOS: CHONG JUN LIANG, SINGPOST, KELVIN CHING

\$1.6k

Starting pay for a postman.

MAKING AMENDS

We've clearly let the public down, we've let ourselves down, and for that we apologise.



SINGPOST GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE PAUL COUTTS



SingPost group chief executive Paul Coutts in the mail room at SingPost Centre. Mr Coutts said the surge in e-commerce volumes exposed weaknesses in SingPost's infrastructure and processes. ST PHOTO: JOSEPH CHUA



People gathering at Trump International Hotel & Tower in Manhattan on Friday to protest against US President Donald Trump's declaration of a national emergency to unlock funds for a border wall. Civil rights groups and Democrats have vowed to mount legal and legislative challenges against what they called an act of presidential overreach. PHOTO: REUTERS

Legal battles over border wall emergency begin

Lawsuit by three land owners and a nature group the first of several to come

Charissa Yong
US Correspondent
In Washington

President Donald Trump's declaration of a national emergency to unlock funds for a border wall was

challenged in court within hours by three Texas land owners and an environmental group, the first of several lawsuits expected as civil rights groups and Democrats vowed to mount legal and legislative challenges against what they called an act of presidential overreach.

The land owners, who had been informed that the government intended to build a wall on their property, said their privacy and quiet enjoyment of their land would be affected, while the nature group said wall construction would destroy habitats and impair wildlife observation, according to the lawsuit filed on their behalf by consumer rights group Public Citizen.

The American Civil Liberties Union and the state of California also vowed to fight Mr Trump's emergency declaration, and attorneys-general in Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and New York are expected to mount legal challenges as well against Mr Trump's efforts to bypass Congress.

"If the President tries to use a made-up emergency to pay for his border wall, then California will see him in court," California Governor Gavin Newsom and attorney-general Xavier Becerra, both Democrats, said in a joint statement.

Mr Trump said on Friday that he was confident his emergency declaration to unlock funds for his border wall would stand up in the Supreme Court, justifying the move as a matter of national security needed to secure the US-Mexico border against what he called "an invasion of drugs... of gangs".

He acknowledged that he might lose in the lower courts but was hopeful that his policy would be upheld by the Supreme Court, a process his administration went through last year over its travel ban targeting people from several Muslim-majority countries.

The emergency declaration was the first step to securing up to US\$3.6 billion (S\$4.8 billion) reallocated from military construction projects, after Congress granted the President US\$1.375 billion for

90km of fencing, only a quarter of the US\$5.7 billion he had asked for.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a joint statement on Friday that Mr Trump's actions violated the Congress' exclusive power to allocate federal funds as enshrined in the Constitution, calling it "a power grab by a disappointed President".

"The Congress will defend our constitutional authorities in the Congress, in the courts, and in the public, using every remedy available," they added.

The White House defended the legality of the move, which acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney told reporters was due to Congress "being simply incapable of providing the amount of money necessary, in the President's eyes, to address the current situation at the border".

Office of Management and Budget acting director Russell Vought said it was common authority to be able to declare a national emergency and presidents had done so 58 times since the National Emergencies Act was enacted in 1976.

Constitutional law experts, however, argued that Mr Trump's declaration this time was a fairly unprecedented use of that authority.

Georgetown University law professor Mary McCord said many emergency declarations were responses to crises in other countries and generally had to do with blocking property, access to funds, and prohibiting financial transactions with designated persons or entities who presented threats to the US due to terrorism, espionage and other matters. "That doesn't seem to exist at all with respect to this declaration of national emergency," she told reporters in a briefing call organised by the American Constitution Society.

Ohio State University law professor Peter Shane, who specialises in separation of powers, said national emergencies typically resulted in immediate responses, adding that he could think of no other case in which a president declared a national emergency directing other agencies to engage in a multi-year construction project in response to an exigency.

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Q&A

1

Q What is a national emergency?

A In 1976, Congress passed the National Emergencies Act, which permits the president to pronounce a national emergency when he considers it appropriate.

The Act offers no specific definition of "emergency" and allows a president to declare one entirely at his discretion.

By declaring a national emergency, the president avails himself of dozens of specialised laws. Some of these powers have funds the president could otherwise not access.

Under current law, emergency powers lapse within a year unless the president renews them.

A national emergency can be re-declared indefinitely and, in practice, that is done frequently. There have been 58 pronounced under the National Emergencies Act, of which 31 are still in effect.

2

Q What happens once a national emergency has been declared?

A Even though there are not many limits on a president's ability to declare an emergency, it does not create carte blanche freedom to act.

Anyone directly affected by the order can challenge it in court, which Ms Elizabeth Goitein – co-director of the Brennan Centre for Justice's Liberty and National Security Programme – said will almost certainly happen in this case.

Congress can also draft a concurrent resolution to terminate the state of emergency, leading to a somewhat novel act.

Ordinarily, congressional resolutions support a president's declaration of a national emergency.

Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is expected to bring up a "joint resolution of termination" in the House. Doing so would force Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to also bring up the resolution in the Republican-majority Senate, putting his members in a difficult position. The House Democrats can also join an outside lawsuit or choose to sue on their own.

3

Q Does Congress have enough votes to terminate the emergency declaration?

A Like any legislation passed by Congress, the president could veto the resolution unless it has received supermajority support (two-thirds in each chamber).

Many Republicans have been critical of this approach by President Donald Trump, mainly because they see it as a slippery slope for a future Democratic president using the power to advance his policy goals. But it is unclear whether there are enough of them to vote against the president (and his base) to override a veto.

WASHINGTON POST

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Trump makes case for Nobel Peace Prize

UNDESERVING OF PRIZE

They gave it to Obama. He didn't even know what he got it for. He was there for about 15 seconds and he got the Nobel Prize. He said, 'Oh, what did I get it for?'



PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP

WASHINGTON • United States President Donald Trump made the case on Friday that he deserves to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on North Korea and Syria, but complained he probably would never get the honour.

Mr Trump, a Republican, capped off a rambling Rose Garden news conference with a well-oiled gripe that former Democratic President Barack Obama, a nemesis, won the Nobel Prize in 2009, just months into his first term in office.

"They gave it to Obama. He didn't even know what he got it for. He was there for about 15 seconds and he got the Nobel Prize. He said, 'Oh, what did I get it for?'" Mr Trump grumbled. "With me, I probably will never get it."

Mr Trump claimed he saved three million people living in Syria's rebel-held Idlib region from being

killed after he warned Russia, Iran and the Syrian government against a planned offensive. "Nobody talks about that," he said.

He said Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had given him "the most beautiful copy" of a five-page letter in which Mr Abe nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize for opening talks and easing tensions with North Korea.

"You know why? Because he had rocket ships and he had missiles flying over Japan," Mr Trump said. "Now, all of a sudden, they feel good. They feel safe. I did that."

He added that the Obama administration "couldn't have done it".

The White House declined further comment on Mr Trump's claim that Mr Abe had nominated him, and a spokesman for the Japanese embassy said he had no information about such a letter. REUTERS

After the royal storm

Thai Princess' short foray into politics seems like a footnote, with talk centring on whether King knew of her plans

Tan Hui Yee
Indochina Bureau Chief
In Bangkok

Clad in leg-hugging pants and a jacket studded with glittering hearts, Thai Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya performs a cheeky *luk thung* number that leaves her audience gyrating downstage. The crowd, already stoked by the country music, squeals when she starts flinging stalks of roses into the air.

"It's Valentine's Day today. Let's love each other, okay?" she tells the teenagers massed at a school in Phichit province, some 300km north of Bangkok, for a concert held as part of her anti-drug campaign. "I'm happy to come see you all in person. Seeing (each other) from television may not be good enough."

It has been almost a week since the 67-year-old Princess waded into politics, only to have her candidacy for prime minister swiftly ruled out by her younger brother, King Maha Vajiralongkorn.

The Thai Raksa Chart party, linked to former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, nominated her as its prime minister candidate on Feb 8, stunning Thais used to treating royalty as above politics and beyond reproach.

If the nomination had gone through, it would have given a massive fillip to Thaksin, who was ousted in a coup in 2006 and remains a polarising figure even though he lives in exile.

But a late-night statement from the King on Feb 8 declared that she remained a member of the royal family despite relinquishing her title in 1972, and that involving her in politics was inappropriate and against the convention of constitutional monarchies. Her nomination was nullified by the Election Commission on Monday while Thai Raksa Chart faces dissolution.

The Princess responded via Instagram, a photo-sharing network on which she has about 10,000 followers. On the morning of Feb 9, she thanked well-wishers, saying she wanted to see Thailand "move forward to be admired and accepted by the international community".

On Tuesday, she wrote: "I'm sorry that my honest intention to work for the country and the Thai people has caused problems that shouldn't have occurred in this era."

She added an English hashtag, #howcomeitisthewayitis.

THE JITTERS

The confounding episode put coup-prone Thailand on the edge. Pictures of a military convoy on the road spread alarm even though there were signs on the vehicles indicating they were "for training".

Then a document appeared on social media last weekend purportedly showing Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha ordering the removal of Thailand's top military generals. They included army chief Apirat Kongsompong, who is seen as being close to the King.

Mr Prayut promptly dismissed this as "fake news" on Monday, but fears of an imminent coup were put to rest only after General Apirat appeared alongside the Prime Minister on Thursday at an exercise at the Special Forces command base in central Lopburi province.

The army chief told the Agence France-Presse news agency that he and Mr Prayut were "very close".



Princess Ubolratana (above) performing in front of students (below) at Phichit Pittayakom school on Thursday. More than 1,000 students turned up to see her in one of her first few public appearances since Feb 8, when the Thai Raksa Chart party, linked to former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, nominated her as its prime minister candidate for next month's polls. PHOTOS: FACEBOOK/TO BE NUMBER ONE FANCLUB

Coming so near the promised end of military rule – five years after then army chief Prayut ousted a popularly elected Pheu Thai Party government from power – the hysteria only underlined the tenuous nature of Thai democracy.

Meanwhile, the Thai Raksa Chart party has braced itself for the worst. After the Election Commission declared it "hostile to the constitutional monarchy", the Constitutional Court swiftly took up the case to dissolve the party on Thursday. The party's executives say they will stop election campaigning before the next hearing on Feb 27.

"Most people expect the party to be dissolved. The question is when," said Dr Attasit Pankaew, a political scientist at Thammasat University.

As Thai Raksa Chart was created to help Pheu Thai win parliamentary seats under new election rules, its demise before the March 24 polls will leave a gaping hole in this strategy, he noted.

But if it is dissolved after March 24, its winning candidates can join another party.

There are over 13,000 potential candidates from up to 81 political parties contesting the election, but most of the attention has fallen on Mr Prayut, who looks well placed to return as prime minister on the Palang Pracharath Party ticket.

He has not been seen at the party's campaign activities so far. Yesterday, he mingled with vendors at Bangkok's Chatuchak flea market on a tour with his personal entourage.

BLUE BLOOD

One week on, Princess Ubol-



ratana's 13-hour foray into politics now seems more like a footnote.

Among political watchers, discussion has been consumed by the question of whether the King knew about and initially approved of her plans, and what that would mean for the power of the very assertive monarch, as well as the military.

Thaksin allies who were perturbed by her nomination from the outset are relieved that they will no longer have the potentially treacherous task of navigating such a high-bearing aristocrat through the trenches of everyday political life.

Under the lese majeste law, any act deemed to have insulted or defamed the king, queen, heir apparent or regent can attract a jail sen-

tence of up to 15 years. The law has been widely interpreted before.

Princess Ubolratana herself has been very candid about the insulated nature of palace life.

In 1972, when she renounced her royal title to marry a fellow student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, she told The New York Times she was "no longer royalty and am free".

She returned to Thailand after her divorce in 1998. In 2001, she gave an interview to Praew, a local magazine, that reflected on her life in the United States, which included household work like scrubbing bathrooms.

"Doing so allowed me to see the world out there, even though it brought me grief sometimes," she

said, according to excerpts reproduced by Silpa Wattanatham magazine. "Staying here (in Thailand), I have joy in my work, but it's like I am a woman who is out of bounds, a puppet, a doll for show."

She has maintained her straight-talking style over the years. In 2016, as the post-coup government grappled with Thailand's deep political divisions, she said in a wide-ranging interview on Channel 3: "It will help the current situation if we open our minds, especially if seniors open theirs, to accept the reality of the world, to see other people's ideas, to broaden our attitudes. Then, we can walk together. If not, we would just hate each other. It would be useless."

In a quarterly magazine pro-

duced by her anti-drug and youth development project To Be Number One, the Princess pens advice to teens aching over self-esteem, homework and gender issues.

"Mindfulness is about always being aware of what we are doing," she wrote in one 2017 edition. "Never let anyone, even those we love, hurt us or pressure us to do what we don't like."

But royalty shall remain royalty. At the Phichit Pittayakom school on Thursday morning, workmen repainted kerbs and hosed down driveways to prepare for one of her first few public appearances since Feb 8. Giant billboards declared "We Love Tunkramom Ying", which means daughter of the queen, a title she was given after she returned to Thailand.

More than 1,000 students rehearsed chants like "song phra slender", in reference to a joke she once made about altering that typical blessing for royals, to keep her slender. As policemen and soldiers kept watch, the smartphone-toting teens were also reminded of the royal protocol that no photography or filming was allowed.

Among those in the crowd was Ms Mui Nawaphum, 78, who turned up dressed in a new silk sarong and blouse specially bought for the occasion.

She remained unfazed as the helicopter bearing the royal landed nearby after sundown. The Princess went on stage at about 10pm.

"She looked gorgeous," Ms Nawaphum told The Sunday Times. "I saw her from a distance, but it was good enough."

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Prayut, Thaksin allies get nod to run for Thai prime minister

BANGKOK • Pro-democracy allies of exiled former leader Thaksin Shinawatra and the current Prime Minister, Mr Prayut Chan-o-cha, were among 68 candidates from 44 parties cleared to run in Thailand's first election since the 2014 military coup.

Leading parties chose their representatives for prime minister

weeks ago, but Thailand's election rules require that candidates be approved by the Election Commission, based on a list of character and other requirements.

According to the commission late on Friday, Mr Prayut, the junta leader who seized power from a government led by Thaksin's sister, was cleared to run in next month's

contest. Ms Sudarat Keyuraphan, Mr Chadchart Sittipunt and Mr Chaikasem Nitisiri from the Thaksin-linked Pheu Thai Party also won approval, along with former prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva.

The Thai Raksa Chart Party, another opposition party connected to Thaksin, did not field any candidates, after King Maha Vajira-

longkorn this month rejected the party's shock pick of his sister, Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya.

Late on Friday, a court lifted a broadcasting ban imposed on Voice TV, a Thaksin-linked station, as it considers the merits of a 15-day shutdown handed down by a government regulator.

The commission on Friday also

announced the names of 2,810 party-list candidates who are qualified to contest the March 24 election – including representatives of Thai Raksa Chart.

The names of constituency candidates were also announced on Friday, but in their own constituencies.

Candidates put forward by the embattled Thai Raksa Chart were certi-

fied as qualified despite a pending lawsuit that could result in the party's dissolution.

The party announced on Friday that its executive members would refrain from campaigning for now and instead focus on fighting the case before the Constitutional Court. BLOOMBERG, THE NATION/ASIA NEWSNETWORK

Hubby of student who had affair with lecturer sues him and school

South Korean seeks damages for mental distress and cost of medical treatment in a test case

K.C. Vijayan
Senior Law Correspondent

An American lecturer teaching English here has already been fired for having an affair with one of his students. Now, the distressed husband

wants the courts to hold him and the school responsible.

South Korean Bae Jun-ho is seeking damages for mental distress and the cost of medical treatment in a test case on whether an aggrieved party can sue a third party for an extramarital tryst involving his wife.

The defendant, Mr Samuel Daimwood, is contesting the suit, arguing that the affair was consensual.

Mr Bae also alleged that the London School of Business and Finance (LSBF) breached its duty of care.

Lawyers for Mr Daimwood, 35,

and the school want the case struck off, arguing that there is no reasonable cause of action. A High Court hearing on this is due next month.

Mr Daimwood's lawyers from Engelin Teh Practice said Mr Bae's suit "appears to be framed as a breach of some form of duty of care when, in effect, it is a disguised claim for damages for adultery".

Mr Bae, 32, and his wife Kang Eunjeong, 28, married in January 2017 and came to Singapore five months later – he on an employment pass and she on a dependant's pass.

She enrolled in a preparatory course in English in January last year but by March, her behaviour towards her husband changed and she started coming home late, according to court papers.

Mr Bae placed a surveillance camera in his home.

He said he was extremely shocked and stricken when he saw on his phone Mr Daimwood entering his house on May 13 – the day he left for Bangkok on a business trip.

Mr Daimwood, who was co-teacher of the upper intermediate English class the wife attended, agreed the encounters continued for six days at the couple's home. He said the first time he went there was at the wife's invitation to watch a Korean movie and try Korean food.

In defence papers filed by his lawyers Shaun Marc Lew, Charmaine Lim and Mark Yeo, he denied Mr Bae suffered psychiatric injury or loss caused by him, and even if he did suffer loss, Mr Daimwood was not liable by law to compensate him.

The school, in its defence filed by its lawyer Bhargavan Sujatha, of Gavan Law Practice, said any anxieties Mr Bae suffered was the result of the extramarital affair and had nothing to do with the school. It argued that

Ms Kang was capable of managing her own affairs and was not "vulnerable, impressionable and unexposed" as claimed by the plaintiff.

Mr Bae, in papers filed by lawyer Anil Narain Balchandani, of Red Lion Circle, alleged that the school was liable for the psychiatric injury inflicted on him by Mr Daimwood in the course of his employment with the school.

According to Mr Bae's psychiatrist, the distress he suffered was beyond the "garden variety" in terms of intensity and duration, and severely compromised his work performance, among other things.

LSBF chief executive Rathakrishnan Govind said the events occurred outside school hours and the school did not police what staff and students did after hours.

"On learning of the incident, the school terminated the services of the lecturer," he added.

In 2015, South Korea's top court abolished a 1953 law that made adultery illegal and punishable with a prison term. Cases against nearly 1,800 people accused of adultery were immediately dropped, while nine people who were in jail for adultery were released.

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In sickness and in health: The love story of a couple married for 72 years

Choo Yun Ting

In their 72 years of marriage, Mr Phua Gee Moh and Madam Han Fong Tin endured hardship and being apart from each other.

In a Facebook post on Valentine's Day, Assisi Hospice shared their story, which embodies the spirit of love in sickness and in health.

The couple got married in 1947 in China's Hainan province – he was 21 and she was 20 – but lived apart for more than 10 years after their wedding.

This was because Mr Phua came to Singapore to work to support the family, while Madam Han stayed in Hainan to take care of his elderly mother and their child.

When his financial situation improved, Mr Phua arranged for his family to join him in Singapore. However, the couple were still often apart as he was a sailor and would be out at sea regularly.

This did not stop Mr Phua from expressing his love for his wife: He would cook Hainanese chicken rice for her whenever he was back home.

Three years ago, Madam Han, now 92, was diagnosed with dementia. Eventually, she was able to recognise only her husband.

Despite his own advanced years, Mr Phua took over the household chores and became her sole caregiver.

The chicken rice that he often cooked for her when they were younger became one of the few memories she held on to as her dementia worsened.

However, in December last year, the couple received more bad news: Mr Phua was stricken with leukaemia. His conditioned worsened quickly and he was admitted

to Assisi Hospice on Jan 9.

But the couple were able to spend Mr Phua's final days together. The hospice's palliative care team arranged for her to be admitted to the hospice and converted a double room for them, allowing Mr Phua to continue caring for his wife.

When he was first admitted to the hospice, Mr Phua could still walk.

He and Madam Han would walk to the dining hall together and share their meals, spending a lot of time talking to each other, a spokesman for Assisi Hospice told The Sunday Times.

Mr Phua knew his wife's preferences, and made sure that the nurses were aware of her needs as well, reminding them to provide softer food for her and to ensure that she had her black handbag with her as it offers her a sense of security.

When Mr Phua's condition worsened and he was bedridden, the couple reversed roles as Madam Han became more involved in taking care of him.

"She would pour water for him and help him with his meals. When he was running a fever, she would sit by his side on his bed, replacing the cool towel placed on his head to lower his temperature," the hospice spokesman said.

On Jan 22, Mr Phua died peacefully in the hospice at age 93, with Madam Han at his bedside.

His wife was his greatest concern, and before he died, he made sure that she would be well taken care of.

The couple's only son and daughter-in-law, who are in their 70s, suffer from chronic illnesses.

The hospice has arranged for Madam Han to be cared for in a nursing home, the spokesman said.

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Above: Mr Phua Gee Moh and his wife, Madam Han Fong Tin, when they were younger.

Below: Assisi Hospice converted a double room for the loving couple so that Mr Phua, 93, who had leukaemia, could continue to care for Madam Han, 92, who has dementia. Mr Phua died on Jan 22, with Madam Han at his bedside.

PHOTOS: FACEBOOK/ASSISI HOSPICE



REVERSING ROLES

She would pour water for him and help him with his meals. When he was running a fever, she would sit by his side on his bed, replacing the cool towel placed on his head to lower his temperature.



AN ASSISI HOSPICE SPOKESMAN, on how their roles reversed when Mr Phua's condition worsened and he was bedridden. Madam Han became more involved in taking care of him.

Former US cardinal defrocked for sex crimes



Theodore McCarrick is the highest-profile church figure to be dismissed from priesthood in modern times.

VATICAN CITY • Former US cardinal Theodore McCarrick has been expelled from the Roman Catholic priesthood after he was found guilty of sexual crimes against minors and adults, the Vatican said yesterday.

Pope Francis has decided that the ruling, which followed an appeal by the man who was a power broker as archbishop of Washington, DC from 2001 to 2006, was final.

A Vatican statement said his crimes were made more serious by "the aggravating factor of the abuse of power".

McCarrick, who in July became the first Roman Catholic prelate in nearly 100 years to lose the title of cardinal, has now become the highest-profile church figure to be dismissed from priesthood in modern times.

The decision comes as the Church grapples with a decades-long sexual abuse crisis that has exposed how predator priests were moved from parish to parish instead of being defrocked or turned over to the civilian authorities in countries across the globe.

With the ruling, Pope Francis appears to be sending a signal that even those in the Church's highest echelons will be held accountable.

Defrocking means McCarrick can no longer call himself a priest or celebrate the sacraments.

The allegations against the defrocked priest date back to decades ago. He has responded publicly to only one of the allegations, saying he has "absolutely no recollection" of an alleged case of sexual abuse of a 16-year-old boy more than 50 years ago.

Vatican spokesman Alessandro Gisotti said the ruling showed that "different treatment for bishops who have committed or covered up abuse in fact represents a form of clericalism that is no longer acceptable". REUTERS

The decision comes as the Church grapples with a decades-long sexual abuse crisis that has exposed how predator priests were moved from parish to parish instead of being defrocked or turned over to the civilian authorities in countries across the globe.

MOE guide to help parents work better with schools

It aims to forge meaningful school-home partnerships to enhance kids' learning journey

Fabian Koh

Mutual respect and trust are the foundation of a new set of Ministry of Education (MOE) guidelines on how parents and schools can work together for a child's benefit.

They include points on how parents and schools can cooperate to help children pick up self-management skills, build resilience and take responsibility and ownership of their learning.

While MOE is making shifts in the system to better help students develop the joy of learning and to be lifelong learners, meaningful school-home partnerships will ensure that children benefit fully from the changes, said Senior Parlia-

mentary Secretary for Education Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim at yesterday's announcement at Yu Neng Primary School.

Dr Faishal said the partnership is focused on helping children understand how school is relevant to the rest of their lives, such as why they study certain subjects and take part in co-curricular activities.

The guidelines highlight several areas for parents:

- To communicate regularly with teachers about the academic and non-academic aspects of their children.
- To check how teachers prefer to communicate, as they are not required to share their mobile numbers with parents and may not be able to respond to queries



WORKING HAND-IN-HAND

Our children do best when schools and parents work hand-in-hand to support them. We hope these guidelines on school-home partnership will be a useful reference for both teachers and parents, to help our children have ownership over their learning, develop a sense of purpose and succeed in life.



SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION MUHAMMAD FAISHAL IBRAHIM

Children preparing breakfast for their fathers at an event at Yu Neng Primary School yesterday.
ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

immediately. When disagreements happen between students, parents should let the school verify the facts before taking any action.

- To create a conducive home environment for children to read and to do their homework on their own.

At the same time, the guidelines encourage a healthy, balanced lifestyle for the children, with sufficient time for them to sleep and play. Time management is also emphasised, with parents encouraged to get their children involved in household chores.

The guidelines will be shared

with parents through the schools, and schools will align their practices with the new guidelines this year. Each school will have to figure out how to apply them within its own context and environment.

Dr Faishal added: "Our children do best when schools and parents work hand-in-hand to support them. We hope these guidelines on school-home partnership will be a useful reference for both teachers and parents, to help our children have ownership over their learning, develop a sense of purpose and succeed in life."

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Firm action against blackout culprits: Koh Poh Koon

Ng Huiwen

The authorities will take firm action against those found responsible for the equipment failure that caused a recent blackout in central Singapore, Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry Koh Poh Koon said in a Facebook post yesterday.

"EMA has assured me that they will take firm action against any party found to be responsible for the disruption depending on the outcome of the investigations," Dr

Koh said, referring to the Energy Market Authority (EMA).

EMA would also be working with SP Group and equipment suppliers to ensure that Singapore's power system remained reliable and robust, and that the chances of Thursday's incident happening again were minimised, he added.

Dr Koh visited SP Group's Kim Chuan substation, which contains transmission and distribution network equipment, and watched a demonstration of some maintenance-testing processes.

SP Group shared details of its regular maintenance regime, including regular testing of equipment and checks to monitor their condition.

On Thursday, electricity supply to parts of Bugis, City Hall, Marina and Somerset was disrupted for 12 minutes. The equipment failure also caused an electricity flashover, resulting in a fire at the Carlton Hotel, and affected seven MRT stations on the North East Line.

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S'pore's unique middle way: Indranee

Fruits of economic growth used to build fair, inclusive society, says Minister in PMO

Adrian Lim
Political Correspondent

Despite its generally low taxes, Singapore is still able to achieve social outcomes – in education, health-care, and home ownership – beyond that of other countries.

This is the result of “a carefully calibrated combination of maintaining a broad tax base, diverse sources of revenue, viable economic strategies, sound governance, and fiscal prudence”, said Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), Ms Indranee Rajah, in a commentary in today’s The Sunday Times.

And while the economy is based on free-market principles, the fruits are harnessed to build a fair and inclusive society, she added.

Ms Indranee, who is also Second Minister for Finance and Education, was responding to a commentary on Singapore’s socialist roots by Harvard professor Steven Kelman, published in last Sunday’s papers.

While he praised Singapore’s growth and alleviation of poverty, Prof Kelman said he was worried that today’s Singapore has “moved from being a cause to being more of a corporation”, and noted how the People’s Action Party (PAP) had undergone a shift in ideology from being socialist democrat.

In response, Ms Indranee said that the PAP government “remains true to its mission of a fair and just society, by creating opportunities for all, redistributing wealth according to need, and effective social spending”.

She added that despite Singapore’s generally low tax rates, expenditure by social ministries has doubled between Financial Year (FY) 2009 and FY2018.

This is achieved in three ways: First, supplementing the revenue by the Net Investment Returns Contribution (NIRC) – the income on the reserves. The NIRC has more than doubled from \$7 billion in FY2009 to \$16 billion in FY2018, Ms Indranee said.

Second, Singapore maintains fiscal prudence and avoids high debt, and, third, taxes are collected and used effectively, she noted.

While Prof Kelman noted how Singapore’s corporate tax rate was 40 per cent until 1987, and progressively lowered, Ms Indranee pointed out that reinstating this would be a “crushing burden on our companies and render us uncompetitive, resulting in loss of investments, jobs and revenues”.

She added: “We are not preoccupied with growth for growth’s sake, but because growth creates jobs and gives our people good incomes while generating the tax revenues necessary to help our elderly, vulnerable and disadvantaged and meet other vital public needs like defence and infrastructure.”

A fair and progressive system is maintained and half of Singapore’s working population does not have to pay taxes, she noted.

“Of those who do, the ones who earn more, pay more. On redistribution, we ensure that those who need more, get more,” she said.

“If we were truly an unbridled corporation, we would not put back revenue from land sales into past reserves, or refrain from using up all the income from our reserves. But we do, because we believe that we must keep something for our children and grandchildren.

“For the PAP government, Singaporeans and Singapore remain very much our cause. Our means may be capitalist but our objectives and goals are caring and compassionate... Ours is a middle way uniquely our own,” she concluded.

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SEE INSIGHT B8



Delicious Heirlooms by Ms Ow Kim Kit (right) was launched yesterday at the National Library. The book features well-known family food businesses here. ST PHOTO: TIMOTHY DAVID

Fresh take on S'pore food heritage

The stories of 10 well-known family-run restaurants in Singapore, some dating back to the 1920s, are featured in a new book called Delicious Heirlooms. They are Fatty Weng, Guan Hoe Soon, Huat Kee, Islamic Restaurant, Ka-Soh (Swee Kee), Ming Chung Restaurant, Muthu’s Curry, Sabar Menanti, Samy’s Curry and Spring Court.

The author, lawyer Ow Kim Kit, chose businesses that are at least 50 years old as of this year.

The book recounts the sacrifices and hardship that the restaurant founders experienced when they came to Singapore as immigrants who brought culinary influences from their homeland, and how they managed to successfully create “Singaporean cuisine”.

The Straits Times Press publication, out in bookstores now, was supported by the National Heritage Board. All proceeds – the book costs \$30 before GST – will go to the charity Club Rainbow.

Ms Sim Ann, Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information, and for Culture, Community and Youth, said: “There is no better time for this book to be launched than at the beginning of our bicentennial commemorations.

“It is a timely tribute not only to our rich multicultural food heritage but also to the many sacrifices our forefathers made to ensure that Singapore continued to progress over the decades.”

Melody Zaccheus



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Colour and splendour at Chingay



President Halimah Yacob and her husband Mohamed Abdullah Alhabshee were joined by Minister for Trade and Industry and deputy chairman of People's Association, Mr Chan Chun Sing, yesterday at the Chingay parade, held at the F1 Pit Building. The annual event, part of the Chinese New Year festivities, this year coincides with the bicentennial, which commemorates the 200th anniversary of Sir Stamford Raffles' arrival here in 1819. The parade featured about 6,500 performers from more than 50 local and foreign contingents. ST PHOTOS: TIMOTHY DAVID



Festival explores lesser-known stories of Singapore's past

Month-long line-up of interactive projects developed by youth to bring history to life

Melody Zaccheus
Heritage and Community Correspondent

History is far from boring, as organisers of The Future of Our Pasts festival are aiming to prove, with their month-long line-up of 11 multidisciplinary projects exploring lesser-known stories of Singapore's past.

The festival, by Yale-NUS College in support of the Singapore Bicentennial Office, will feature an interactive theatrical installation, films

and graphic novels.

There will also be a music event called Sarong Party, which features a performance reflecting on Singapore's colonial legacy; trivia nights testing knowledge of Singapore's history, such as the various communities of the Straits Settlements; and a board-game night, where participants can fight for the favour of the Temenggong and discover treasures as an 1800s trader.

Other highlights include documentary films on Tampines Junior College before it merged with Meri-

dian Junior College this year, and life as a young mixed-race couple – a Malaysian Ceylonese Tamil male and a Chinese American female.

The festival, which was developed with a pool of young artists and cultural advocates, was launched at Golden Mile Tower's The Projector yesterday.

It was officiated by Education Minister Ong Ye Kung, who said he had approached Yale-NUS president Tan Tai Yong to find ways to encourage youth to engage with Singapore's history on a personal level. He said the Ministry of Education set aside a small budget for this.

"Through the festival, the young creators are making history more relatable and accessible. This is an im-

portant endeavour as we try to connect with our past, gain a better understanding of our history, and better understand the soul of our nation and people," said Mr Ong.

Professor Tan said open calls for proposals for the festival started in 2017. He said they were looking to support projects by young people that explore historical narratives that resonate with them.

The creators then developed their projects over the past 18 months.

"As a historian, I know full well that my subject of study is often seen as overly academic, textbook-based, even 'boring,'" Prof Tan said.

"Admittedly, it can sometimes be challenging for people to relate to a



Education Minister Ong Ye Kung writing a message of well wishes for The Future of Our Pasts at the launch of the festival at Golden Mile Tower's The Projector yesterday. Looking on are (from left) Mr Gene Tan, executive director of the Singapore Bicentennial Office, and members of one of the festival's projects, called Intimacies, Mr Calvin Teo and Ms Oh Kailin. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

broad, national historical narrative on any deep personal level. The future of our pasts festival seeks to change that perception of history."

Other projects include a magazine called Meantime, which fea-

tures a collection of love stories from yesteryear and has old photographs such as one of a couple's first date at a cinema in the 1950s.

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STAGE PROGRAMME			
TIME	25 FEB 2019 (Monday)	26 FEB 2019 (Tuesday)	27 FEB 2019 (Wednesday)
11.00pm to 12.00pm		NR Nobel™: An Innovative Breakthrough in the Field of Life Extension and Longevity in Cosmetics by AVIV International Pte Ltd	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd
12.00pm to 1.00pm	Increase Profitability and Productivity with Microneedling, Plasma and Clinical Module Core for Professionals by Meijo Skincare Wellness	Increase Profitability and Productivity with Microneedling, Plasma and Clinical Module Core for Professionals by Meijo Skincare Wellness	Increase Profitability and Productivity with Microneedling, Plasma and Clinical Module Core for Professionals by Meijo Skincare Wellness
1.00pm to 2.00pm	3D Aesthetics Solutions via AI Technology by HRS Technology Pte Ltd	3D Aesthetics Solutions via AI Technology by HRS Technology Pte Ltd	DR. HOU & LING Double Extracts Diamond White Essence by Jing Rui Biotechnology - Cai En International Ltd
2.00pm to 3.00pm	The Most Advanced Reproduction Beauty in Japan by Beauty Planning Inc.	TOKI SKIN: The Japanese Way to Naturally Beautiful, Porcelain Skin by Lift Botanica Pte Ltd	3D Aesthetics Solutions via AI Technology by HRS Technology Pte Ltd
3.00pm to 4.00pm	Miraculous Non Surgical Face Lift by FABLife Pte Ltd	DR. HOU & LING LIPOFORM Bust Plus Lotion by Jing Rui Biotechnology - Cai En International Ltd	Your Skills Your Future: Latest Government Subsidy Beauty Courses 2019 by SOQ Biz Hub Pte Ltd
4.00pm to 5.00pm	NR Nobel™: An Innovative Breakthrough in the Field of Life Extension and Longevity in Cosmetics by AVIV International Pte Ltd	The Myth of Japanese Cosmetics, 'NAHLS' by Deep Impact Co., Ltd.	NR Nobel™: An Innovative Breakthrough in the Field of Life Extension and Longevity in Cosmetics by AVIV International Pte Ltd
5.00pm to 6.00pm	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd	Miraculous Non Surgical Face Lift by FABLife Pte Ltd	Self-Defence Power - Our Body's Inherent Ability to Heal by Nature Produce
6.00pm to 7.00pm	Self-Defence Power - Our Body's Inherent Ability to Heal by Nature Produce	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd	
WORKSHOP PROGRAMME			
TIME	25 FEB 2019 (Monday)	26 FEB 2019 (Tuesday)	27 FEB 2019 (Wednesday)
11.30pm to 12.30pm	3D Aesthetics Solutions via AI Technology by HRS Technology Pte Ltd		
12.30pm to 1.30pm	7 Minutes Miracle Face Lift by FABLife Pte Ltd	7 Minutes Miracle Face Lift by FABLife Pte Ltd	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd
1.30pm to 2.30pm	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd	Nano Hair Restoration by H-Plus (S) Pte Ltd
2.30pm to 3.30pm	The Best Body Contouring Tech of Both Worlds: NobleShape with LD+AMF+RF by Aesthetics Marketing Asia Pte Ltd	Add a Whole New Dimension to your AGASSI - The Latest RF Smile Lifting & Vaginal Tightening Concept by Aesthetics Marketing Asia Pte Ltd	Bio-Jet - The Next Generation of Needle-Free Transdermal Drug Delivery Concept by Aesthetics Marketing Asia Pte Ltd
3.30pm to 4.30pm	2 Weeks to Brighter, Even and Younger Looking Skin with the Power of Po3™ The Light Serum by 28Cubed by NamZ Pte Ltd	3D Aesthetics Solutions via AI Technology by HRS Technology Pte Ltd	3D Aesthetics Solutions via AI Technology by HRS Technology Pte Ltd
4.30pm to 5.30pm		5 Most Effective Meridian Point for Natural Face Lifting by SOQ Biz Hub Pte Ltd	5 Most Effective Meridian Point for Natural Face Lifting by SOQ Biz Hub Pte Ltd

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Better **JOURNEYS**

My father, your Grab driver

Two of the first recipients of the Grab Scholarship talk about the driving forces in their academic pursuits

BRYANT CHAN

Standing at more than 1.8m tall, Mr Wymann Tang dwarfs his father — Mr Tang Jui Hai comes up only to his son's chin.

But the younger Mr Tang knows that he is where he is today because he stands on the shoulders of a giant. The 22-year-old is a freshman at the National University of Singapore's Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, a course of study popular among his Raffles Junior College peers.

Meanwhile, Mr Tang Jui Hai's formal educational stopped at primary school — something common for his generation.

The 60-year-old used to own a liquid petroleum gas distribution company but his gas prices could not keep up with the subsidised prices offered by the unions. The rising popularity of electric stoves also hit his sales hard, forcing him to shutter the business.

Undeterred, he obtained a Vocational Licence and drove a taxi to put rice on the table, and his children through school. His wife contributed what she could as a part-time cashier at a supermarket.

To most, it would be unthinkable to go from owning a business to driving a taxi, but the career switch was something that had to be done.

Mr Wymann Tang admires his father's stoic tenacity and adaptability. "I think it takes a lot of willpower to do what he does every day," he says. "He's always leaving early and coming back late."

Now a full-time driver for Grab, the older Mr Tang starts driving by 7.30am on weekdays, and comes off shift only in the evening — sometimes later, if business is good.

His major respite comes on Saturday morning, when there are fewer passengers, so he can afford to leave the house a few hours later than usual.

Mr Wymann Tang is aware of the health haz-

ards posed by long periods of continuous driving. He knows his father takes regular breaks — the Grab app ensures this by sending alerts and his mother sends gentle reminders via text messages — but it doesn't stop the medical student from worrying about his father's well-being. Hence, he encourages his father to exercise regularly — they jog together when they have the time.

Unfortunately, this time can often be scarce. Mr Wymann Tang lives on campus and goes home only on weekends. Even then, there's no guarantee of seeing his father, who leaves the family home before Mr Wymann Tang wakes up, and sometimes returns only after his son has gone to bed.

Sometimes, father and son go without seeing each other for weeks, which makes the time they spend together all the more valuable. When they can, the Tangs sit down for family meals, a relative luxury compared to the quick afternoon bites that Mr Tang Jui Hai grabs when on shift.

It may be tough to see his father working hard on his behalf, but it also makes Mr Wymann Tang all the more determined to make the most of his father's sacrifices.

In fact, it is because of his father that his heart was set on becoming a doctor. After his internship at the voluntary welfare organisation Special Olympics Singapore and the Assisi Hospice, Mr Wymann Tang realised he wanted to empower others — just as his father had empowered him to pursue his passions.

"It was meaningful for me to be involved in healthcare. Medicine is a field that enables you to empower others," he says. "There are probably a lot of people out there who are like my parents, people who work so hard they hardly have time to care for their own health."

This is why Mr Wymann Tang is grateful for the insurance that Grab provides for his father, as well as for the \$10,000 afforded to him by the Grab Scholarship, so his father can afford to scale back on his working hours.

But there are still things he worries about when his father is on the road, such as the dangers posed by other road users or abusive passengers. "People should try to empathise more with drivers. It's not easy being on the road for so long."



Mr Wymann Tang (left) wants to become a doctor so that he can empower people, just like his father Tang Jui Hai (right) empowered him to achieve his dreams. PHOTO: BENJAMIN LIM

“People should try to empathise more with drivers. It's not easy being on the road for so long.”

— Mr Wymann Tang

In good spirits

Laughter is the glue that binds the Ngs. Mr Ng Kah Hui and his father Ng Ban Hoe crack jokes with abandon, laughing and clapping each other on the shoulder.

"Humour is really what my father is best known for," says the 24-year-old. And it is also that sense of humour that helped carry the Ngs through turbulent times, such as when Mr Ng Ban Hoe left his job in construction to become a full-time taxi driver 12 years ago.

And he was unfazed despite making the leap after 19 years in construction. "I like to drive. It was a win-win situation for me," says the 53-year-old who is now a private-hire driver.

Mr Ng Kah Hui reveals that the Grab Scholarship came as a huge relief for him and his dad — and a stroke of luck to be one of the chosen 10 out of over 150 applicants.

"I used to worry about how I would finance my university education, so the scholarship eased my concerns," says the future student of Nanyang Technological University's Computer Science Programme.

His two brothers — a 19-year-old polytechnic student and 22-year-old national serviceman — can only make limited contributions to the household, while his mum helps out with her income as an accounting assistant.

"Thanks to the scholarship, my parents' income can go towards supporting the family," says Mr Ng Kah Hui, whose freshman year will begin in August.

He describes his close-knit family as "a traditional, conservative Chinese family — we don't express our love with words".

He often sees his mother sitting in the living room, waiting for his dad to return from his shift — even when the key turns in the lock at 4am, which it often does. He sees how she prepares his father's favourite soups and steamed fish, ensuring that he doesn't go to work on an empty stomach.

Similarly, he considers his parents' willingness to let him pursue his own passions as a



Mr Ng Kah Hui (left) helps his father Ng Ban Hoe (right) translate the English-language notifications on the Grab app. PHOTO: BENJAMIN LIM

“All my father said was ‘Kah Hui, if you're happy, then that's enough for me.’”

— Mr Ng Kah Hui

form of love. "My parents have never tried to dictate the way my brothers or I live," says Mr Ng Kah Hui.

His parents did not even know what programming was when he announced his chosen course of study, let alone cyber-security or fintech. "All my father said was 'Kah Hui, if you're happy, then that's enough for me.'"

In return, Mr Ng Kah Hui tries to show his affection for his parents in his own way. He knows his father sometimes struggles to understand the English notifications on the app, so he helps him translate, telling him when or where to drive for the best incentives. "This is the least I can do to support him right now."

IN TECH WE TRUST

Less than 9 per cent of the world's population lives in South-east Asia, but according to the World Health Organisation's Road Safety in the South-east Asia Region 2015 report, the region contributes 25 per cent of worldwide road traffic fatalities.

With ride-hailing drivers spending extended hours on the road daily, Grab launched a Safer Everyday Tech Roadmap last year to encourage safe driving behaviours. Here are five examples of how technology is helping drivers.

1. Telematics

A safe trip means less harsh braking, acceleration or speeding. Drivers receive a weekly telematics report on their driving patterns — based on data derived from the Grab driver app — to provide quantifiable feedback.

The results have been promising. Although the distance covered by Grab drivers in Singapore increased by 74 per cent in July last year compared to the previous 12 months, speeding incidents fell by 48 per cent and heavy acceleration incidents, 16 per cent.

2. Driver fatigue monitoring

Grab drivers receive notification reminders to rest when the app detects that they are potentially tired.

This fatigue score is calculated based on metrics such as the driver's age, telematics data, time of day, how many hours they have been driving, and how many jobs they have accepted. The algorithm is constantly being improved through artificial intelligence and machine learning.

3. Live location sharing

By the end of the month, drivers will be able to share their live GPS location with their loved ones — useful if they are driving to more remote areas.

4. Emergency SOS button

If drivers encounter trouble, hitting the SOS button on the app will call up Grab Security or its emergency contacts.

5. Automatic ERP calculator

Forgetting to key in the Electronic Road Pricing charges sometimes eats into a driver's income. Currently in beta, this feature automates the input of ERP fares so that drivers can just focus on driving.

CHAN SIEW LIAN



Brought to you by

Malaysia's prime-minister-in-waiting Anwar Ibrahim with Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad during a political event last year. The two men head separate parties in the ruling coalition.
PHOTO: EPA-EFE



News analysis

Pakatan's missteps mar ambitious reformist agenda

Integrity of party dented by leaders' lies about credentials and abuse of public resources



Shannon Teoh

Malaysia Bureau Chief
In Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's new administration is fast losing its shine as a reformist party with integrity, after a spate of news reports that Pakatan Harapan's (PH) leaders have lied about their credentials, misused public resources as well as welcomed defectors from rival parties they had previously accused of endemic corruption. Last Tuesday, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) accepted seven MPs from former ruling party Umno, igniting fears that the country's top management will revert to the scandal-ridden heyday of the Umno-led Barisan Nasional (BN) government, a mere nine months after voters decided to

remove it from power. PPBM's partners in the ruling coalition – Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) and Democratic Action Party – were swift to denounce the move. “This is like collecting rubbish and contrary to the public mandate at GE14 to reject Umno and BN,” said PKR vice-president Rafizi Ramli, referring to the 14th general election last May that brought an end to 61 years of BN rule. The move by Tun Dr Mahathir – himself a former Umno stalwart – shores up his party, which now has 22 lawmakers, but PKR still remains the largest bloc within PH, with 50 out of 125 MPs. PKR has also beefed up its numbers, adding three independent lawmakers to its camp soon after the election. This comes as PKR president Anwar Ibrahim waits to take over from Dr Mahathir, and these political manoeuvres could affect when the transition takes place. Analysts, however, say it is unfair to write off PH as just another political pact set on consolidating power and enriching itself like BN. “I would hesitate to say PH is BN 2.0 for a couple of reasons. First, the PH coalition has some checks

and balances; Umno was fully dominant in BN. Second, the reform agenda is still on track if shaky,” S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies' senior fellow Johan Saravanamuttu told The Sunday Times. But he acknowledged the “disillusionment and disaffection”, especially since the start of the year, as PH's reform credentials have been repeatedly dented. At least six PH leaders, including three Cabinet ministers, have been accused of falsifying their academic and professional qualifications.

Political risk consultancy KRA's strategy director Amir Fareed Rahim said there has been a “changing of guard rather than of government” as “political elites regardless of party affiliation act a certain way”.

While some of these claims are yet to be proven, the most egregious example is that of Deputy Foreign Minister Marzuki Yahya, whose “Cambridge University” certificate turned out to be from a degree mill in the US. No disciplinary action has been taken against the PPBM secretary-general. Johor Menteri Besar Osman Sapia, also from PPBM, had to confess that he did not finish his accounting courses, and the credentials were duly removed from official websites. Meanwhile, PH government officials have been using public resources for their political gains, actions they used to vilify when they were in the opposition. The abuse included using state-owned vehicles during work hours to campaign in by-elections by officiating at events and promising funding, or even threatening to revoke funding should voters fail to elect their coalition's candidate. Even pledges to practise transparency and end cronyism appear to have been eroded as close confidantes and even family members of leaders, aside from the politicians themselves, have been appointed to top roles in government agencies and state firms. This has provoked ire from civil society groups, a key support base for PH parties over the past two decades.

Most recently, Datuk Junaidah Kiting, the wife of Dr Mahathir's political secretary, was appointed chair of the poverty eradication fund Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia, while Health Minister Dzulkefly Ahmad's daughter was appointed to its board. Political risk consultancy KRA's strategy director Amir Fareed Rahim said there has been a “changing of guard rather than of government” as “political elites regardless of party affiliation act a certain way”. Mr Amir told The Sunday Times that “reformist zeal” has slowed, after the early days of the PH government when it put a moratorium on detention without trial, reduced the powers of the prime minister, and introduced new committees in Parliament to improve legislation. These broken pledges and stalled reforms exacerbate the view that there is a lack of decisiveness in government. Examples include backtracking on a vow to ratify a United Nations anti-discrimination pact in November, and last month's decision to continue negotiating the China-backed East Coast Rail Line project, after scrapping it just a fortnight earlier. And the political jockeying within PH continues, with PPBM last Friday announcing that it will set up in Sabah state despite having agreed to not encroach on Parti Warisan Sabah's turf. Dr Mahathir has said that his party will provide an avenue for former Umno members who do not wish to join Warisan. There are six independent MPs in Sabah who were formerly from Umno. Said Mr Saravanamuttu: “That is the price of democracy, one might say. But that said, there has to be more resolve to correct things and make hard decisions to reduce a growing credibility gap.”

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PAS faces flak over audio recording

Trinna Leong
Malaysia Correspondent
In Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's main religious party has come under fire after it admitted last week to lying about a voice recording that reveals it accepted millions of ringgit from former ruling party Umno to co-operate ahead of the general election last year. The recording also triggered a probe by the anti-graft agency into whether payments from Umno to Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) came from 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), the troubled state fund that US investigators say had over US\$4.5 billion (\$6 billion) embezzled from it. PAS leaders have denied allegations that the party received RM90 million (\$30 million) from Umno, and handed over their accounts to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission. But the admission by former PAS youth chief Nik Abduh Nik Aziz last Wednesday that he had lied – with the blessings of party leader Abdul Hadi Awang – about the March 2018 recording has severely eroded the party's credibility and moral high ground. In the audio recording that went viral last year, Mr Nik Abduh is heard saying that PAS had, via two party leaders, accepted RM2 million from Umno. He does not state in the recording if the money came from 1MDB. Mr Nik Abduh had then denied it was him speaking in the recording. However, in a statement last week, Mr Nik Abduh said he had wanted to admit the veracity of the recording but was advised it would be used against PAS in the general election last May. “Immediately, the PAS president gave his blessing for me to deny it. I was happy to follow the mandate,” he said last Wednesday. “Both decisions were compliant with syariah law.” These revelations come just two weeks ahead of a by-election in the Malay-majority ward of Semenyih in Selangor state. While PAS has not fielded a candidate, to avoid splitting the vote with its new ally the Umno-led Barisan Nasional, the scandal could prove a distraction for Malay-Muslim voters. PAS and Umno together amassed two-thirds of the total Malay votes in the general election last year. Analysts, however, say the party's supporters will stand firm. Mr Adib Zalkapli, Malaysia director of Bowergroup Asia, a political risk consultancy, said: “PAS loyalists and those who support the Umno-PAS alliance wouldn't question their allegiance. They believe in the Malay-Muslim agenda, and for them that is a more important issue.” Critics have accused PAS of hypocrisy, by sanctioning lying – a sin – to further its political interests. They have also jumped on the RM2 million payment as evidence that Umno could have paid PAS the RM90 million, an allegation that first surfaced on whistleblower site Sarawak Report in August 2016. PAS secretary-general Takiyuddin Hassan has insisted that the party's bank accounts are clean, while Mr Abdul Hadi has sarcastically quipped that the party's headquarters have elevators that do not work despite PAS supposedly having so much money. Mr Takiyuddin has also defended Mr Nik Abduh, saying the audio recording was taken out of context. “After evaluating the recording, I found that only part of what he said was quoted. What he said was taken out of context,” he told reporters, adding that the anti-corruption agency had yet to discover any evidence of PAS receiving 1MDB money. “That's very clear... Whether implied or indirectly, there was no record whatsoever of us receiving RM10 million, what more RM90 million,” he said.

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Four-cornered fight in Semenyih by-election

SEMENYIH (Selangor) • The Semenyih by-election in Malaysia's Selangor state is set to be a four-cornered fight with Barisan Nasional (BN), Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) and independent candidate Kuan Chee Heng challenging the incumbent Pakatan Harapan (PH). Returning officer Mohd Sayuthi Bakar announced yesterday that none of the four nomination papers had been rejected. PH will defend the state assembly seat it won in last May's general election through Mr Muhammad Aiman Zainali, 30, who is the treasurer of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia's Hulu Langat division. BN's candidate is 58-year-old Mr Zakaria Hanafi, the permanent chairman of the Umno branch at Kampung Sesapan Kelubi. PSM's Mr Nik Aziz Afiq Abdul, 25, and Mr Kuan, a 57-year-old philanthropist, are the other challengers. The mood at the nomination centre was very friendly, as rival party members were seen mingling with

each other as they waited for the nomination process to be completed. The march towards the nomination centre was also a peaceful affair, as supporters gathered at designated locations as early as 8am. The Semenyih by-election was triggered after assemblyman Bakhtiar Mohd Nor died from a heart attack on Jan 11. In the May election, Mr Bakhtiar won a four-cornered fight against BN's Datuk Johan Abd Aziz, Parti Islam SeMalaysia's Mr Mad Shahmidur Mat Kosim and PSM's Mr S. Arutchelvan with a majority of 8,964 votes. The Semenyih vote is the sixth by-election since the general election. It is also the fourth by-election for the Selangor state assembly since last May, the first three being in Sungai Kandis in August and Balakong and Seri Setia in September. The Election Commission has set Feb 26 for early voting, while polling will be held on March 2.

THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



The four candidates in the Semenyih by-election are (from left) Mr Nik Aziz Afiq Abdul of Parti Sosialis Malaysia, independent Kuan Chee Heng, Mr Muhammad Aiman Zainali of Pakatan Harapan and Mr Zakaria Hanafi of Barisan Nasional. This will be the sixth by-election since last May's general election. PHOTO: BERNAMA

Jokowi, Prabowo turn to economics

Food, energy and infrastructure among topics to be covered in today's presidential debate

Linda Yulisman
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

President Joko Widodo will face Mr Prabowo Subianto, his sole challenger in the April 17 election, in a live debate today, the second of five scheduled between the two men in the run-up to the polls.

More than 190 million voters in the world's third largest democracy will be going to the polls which, for the first time, are being held simultaneously with legislative elections.

In their 90-minute encounter today, the two men will debate five issues – energy, food, infrastructure, natural resources and environment – which directly affect the lives of the more than 260 million people in the world's fourth most-populous nation. They will also pose questions to each other as well as answer questions from a panel of experts and activists.

Mr Joko, 57, a reform-minded leader popularly known as Jokowi who assumed office in late 2014, has chosen notable conservative cleric Ma'ruf Amin, 75, as his running mate while Mr Prabowo, 67, a retired army general, has paired up with former investment banker Sandiaga Uno, 49, who was deputy governor of Jakarta.

Mr Prabowo has criticised the policies of the President on the campaign trail, hitting out especially at what he said was the government's reliance on foreign debt to finance its massive infrastructure push, and dependence on food imports. Mr Prabowo has also denounced the government for allowing many Chinese into the country to work.

Mr Aria Bima, the Jokowi-Ma'ruf team's programme director, has said that Mr Joko will during the debate

tackle the issues raised by his challenger, such as on food imports and debt-funded infrastructure.

He said the President will also elaborate on his achievements while in office, comparing them with the goals he set when he began his term.

Mr Joko's infrastructure programmes, which aim to enhance connectivity and lower the cost of transporting goods across the sprawling archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, have been widely touted as his biggest success. Some of the key projects include the construction of the trans-Java toll road on the most densely-populated island of the country, the trans-Papua road in the least developed regions of Papua and West Papua, as well as the mass rapid transit system in the capital Jakarta, which is set to begin operating next month.

To prepare for the debate, Mr Joko has engaged with figures from diverse backgrounds, including academics, professionals and businessmen, Mr Aria, whose party – Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle – backs Mr Joko's candidacy, told The Sunday Times.

Mr Sudirman Said, director for material and debate in the challenger's camp, said Mr Prabowo will be presenting his "big push strategy", which focuses on self-sufficiency in food, energy and water. This includes banning food imports during harvest seasons and shifting to renewable energy sources to wean the country off fossil fuel.

On infrastructure, it aims to build facilities that support job creation.

"Since the beginning, we have viewed the debate as a battle of ideas, rather than an area to corner (the opposing party)," said Mr Sudirman, who was an energy and mineral resources minister in Mr Joko's Cabinet.

An opinion poll done between late December and early January by the survey firm Charta Politika showed the Jokowi-Ma'ruf team ahead in terms of electability in most of Indonesia's 34 provinces.

Meanwhile, many believe that voters will be swayed by the performance of the candidates in the debates, although a recent survey by pollster Populi Centre showed very little change in voter preferences after the first debate, on Jan 17.

Both camps managed to improve their poll numbers only slightly after that debate. The Jokowi-Ma'ruf team scored 54.1 per cent by Jan 19, up from 52 per cent in Dec 18. The Prabowo-Sandi team scored 31 per cent by Jan 19, up slightly from 30.7 per cent in December.

Dr Dimas Oky Nugroho, executive director of Akar Rumpit Strategic Consulting, said the presidential debates would have an impact on undecided and swing voters, which make up about 16 per cent to 20 per cent of the overall number of voters.

"In the second debate, the candidates will have more time to explain their visions," he said

ylinda@sph.com.sg



Indonesia's President Joko Widodo and his challenger Prabowo Subianto shaking hands after their first debate, on Jan 17, while their respective running mates Ma'ruf Amin and Sandiaga Uno look on. PHOTO: REUTERS

Saudi Crown Prince due in Pakistan today as part of Asian tour

JAKARTA • Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has delayed the start of his visit to several Asian countries by a day and will postpone travel to two South-east Asian nations.

Prince Mohammed will arrive in Pakistan today, a day later than scheduled, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry said in a statement without giving a reason for the delay.

He is expected to sign a number of memorandums of understanding for investments including one for the setting up of a US\$10 billion (S\$13.5 billion) oil refinery.

There are heightened tensions between India and Pakistan after an attack on a convoy in Kashmir last week left 40 Indian paramilitary personnel dead and many others injured. Jaish-e-Mohammad, a Pakistan-based terror group, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Kashmir has been divided between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan since 1947 but is claimed in full by both.

It is not clear if the attack and tensions are behind the Saudi prince's delayed visit.

The prince – the kingdom's de facto ruler – is also scheduled to visit China and India as part of an Asian tour during which he is expected to sign a slew of bilateral in-



Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is delaying his trips to Malaysia and Indonesia.

vestment agreements.

He is postponing his trips to Indonesia and Malaysia, according to the respective foreign ministries.

Two Pakistani government sources said the prince is likely to meet Afghan Taliban representatives during his visit to Pakistan as part of efforts to broker an end to Afghanistan's 17-year-old civil war.

Along with other Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia has been part of the peace negotiations and is seen to have some sway over the Afghan Taliban militants due to Riyadh's historical ties with the hardline Islamist group as well as the kingdom's religious clout as the birthplace of Islam.

Saudi Arabia is looking eastward after a troubled year for its relationships with the United States and Europe, with the alliances shaken by the murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents in Istanbul.

BLOOMBERG, REUTERS

German halt in Saudi arms sales a worry, says Airbus

MUNICH/BERLIN • Germany's halt in exports to Saudi Arabia is preventing Britain from completing the sale of 48 Eurofighter Typhoon warplanes to Riyadh, and has delayed potential sales of other weapons such as the A400M military transport, a top Airbus official has said.

Germany last November said it would reject future export licences to Saudi Arabia after the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. It has not formally banned previously approved deals, which would entitle companies to compensation, but has urged industry to refrain from such shipments for now.

Airbus' defence and space chief

Dirk Hoke said uncertainty over the issue had undermined Berlin's credibility, and could threaten future Franco-German defence projects, including a planned Eurodrone that was heading for an initial contract by the end of the year.

"We're facing constraints in many projects, and many problems have been put on ice," Mr Hoke said on Friday, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference.

Germany accounts for just under 2 per cent of total Saudi arms imports, a small percentage compared with the US and Britain, but it makes components for other countries' export contracts. REUTERS

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Mr Yeo Siew Hai
Managing Director, SAA Architects

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May Quek, SUTD Alumnus
Software Engineer, nuTonomy, an Atpiv company

The design thinking abilities I developed at SUTD helped me integrate well into IBM, where I'm able to solve problems quickly and create new technologies for the betterment of society and the world.

Alvin Tan, SUTD Alumnus
Business Transformation Consultant, IBM

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*Based on the study, 'The global state of the art in engineering education', commissioned by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).
*Based on the citation impact of research papers in Clarivate Analytics' 2017 State of Innovation Report.

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Woman brutally beaten in KL lift robbery

KUALA LUMPUR • A robber's brutal assault of a woman inside an MRT station's lift in the Kuala Lumpur district of Cheras has made headlines after it was caught on surveillance camera.

The video of last Thursday's incident, in which the man repeatedly punches and kicks the woman, has since gone viral.

A posting on the MyCrimeWatch community on Facebook logged some 50,000 views as at 6pm yesterday.

The 56-second footage begins with the woman entering the lift, followed closely by the man. The

moment the lift doors close, the man lands a powerful right hook on the side of the woman's head, which floors her instantly.

He punches her several more times, drags her across the floor before grabbing her handbag. The woman attempts to hold on to her handbag, triggering another flurry of punches and kicks from the man.

The lift doors then open at one of the station's floors. The man pins the woman to the side of the elevator, standing still so as not to attract attention while waiting for the doors to close again.

As the doors shut, the man kicks

and punches the woman several more times, and even beats her with her own bag.

As the lift moves down a floor, the woman attempts to stand – but is quickly kicked and punched.

The woman appears to beg the man to return her handbag, stretching her hands towards him, as he ransacks her belongings.

When the lift doors open at another floor, the man drops the bag, after having fished out the woman's wallet, and charges out of the elevator. The woman, by now apparently dazed, slowly walks out of the lift.

City Criminal Investigations Department chief Rusdi Mohd Isa said last Friday that the 48-year-old woman suffered multiple injuries to her body and bruises on her forehead. Senior Assistant Commissioner Rusdi said that the police have recorded statements from three witnesses.

THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



The robbery and brutal beating in the lift of an MRT station in Kuala Lumpur was captured on surveillance camera, and the video has since gone viral. PHOTO: FACEBOOK/ MYCRIMEWATCH

India mourns soldiers killed in Kashmir terror blast

Thousands attend funerals across the country with calls to avenge killings blamed on Pakistan

NEW DELHI • Thousands of mourners across India attended funerals yesterday for some of the 41 soldiers killed in a suicide bombing in Indian-administered Kashmir as a round-the-clock curfew remained in force in part of the restive region.

The paramilitary troops were killed last Thursday as explosives packed in a van ripped through a convoy carrying 2,500 soldiers in the disputed Himalayan region, the deadliest attack in a three-decade-old armed conflict.

TV stations showed coffins

wrapped in Indian flags being carried by thousands of people across their home towns, such as Gaya in the east and Unnao in the north, after the bodies were flown to New Delhi last Friday where Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid a wreath.

India has accused Pakistan of harbouring the militants behind the attack, which has sparked nationwide outrage and some public calls for war against its arch-rival to avenge the killings.

Kashmir has been split between India and Pakistan since indepen-

dence from Britain in 1947, with both the countries, which have fought three wars, claiming it in its entirety.

Two buses of the Central Reserve Police Force in the 78-vehicle convoy were targeted by the bomber on a key highway in the Pulwama district, just outside Srinagar.

The Pakistan-based Islamist group Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) claimed responsibility, and the vehicle was driven by a known local militant named Aadil Ahmad, alias Waqas Commando.

The blast reduced one of the buses to a heap of mangled debris. Pictures showed bodies and body parts strewn all over the highway.

"I feel proud of the martyrdom of

my son. I expect the government of India to avenge the killings," Mr Brish Soreng, father of one of the soldiers, told reporters.

Mr Modi has warned that those responsible had made a "big mistake" and would pay a "very heavy price".

India is garnering diplomatic support after the attack and has vowed to "isolate" Pakistan diplomatically in the international community, saying it has "incontrovertible evidence" of Islamabad's role.

Pakistan has rejected the allegations.

US national security adviser John Bolton called his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval, promising to work with India to "ensure that Pakistan ceases to be a safe haven for JeM

and terrorist groups that target India, the US and others in the region", according to India's Foreign Ministry yesterday.

There were angry street protests in many Indian cities last Friday, and residents held candlelight vigils to pay tribute to the dead.

A round-the-clock curfew was imposed in Kashmir's Jammu city, in the Hindu-majority part of the region, after mobs attacked Muslim properties and set fire to vehicles during a protest against the attack.

In 2016, India launched a "surgical strike" in Pakistan-administered Kashmir after militants hit a military base, killing 19 soldiers. India said special commandos went several kilometres into the Pakistan-controlled side across the heavily militarised Line of Control, the de facto border, killing and destroying militant facilities. Pakistan said the strikes never took place.

India has some 500,000 troops in the region, making it the most militarised zone in the world, after an armed rebellion began in 1989.

Tens of thousands of people have died in the conflict, with most casualties civilians.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WorldBriefs

Pegatron to operate in Batam in April

JAKARTA • iPhone manufacturer Pegatron is scheduled to start operating in Batam in April, after the Taipei-based company agreed to rent a factory in a specially designated economic zone.

It is planning to invest up to US\$300 million (S\$405 million) in the long run.

A trade war between the United States and China prompted the company to leave the latter and enter Asean countries, including Indonesia.

THE JAKARTA POST/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

S'porean visits to Malaysia down 14%

KUALA LUMPUR • The number of visits by Singaporeans, who used to be the largest group of tourists to Malaysia, fell 14 per cent last year while tourists from non-Asean countries increased by 20 per cent.

Mr Muhammad Bakhtiar Wan Chik, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture, said during a dialogue with Penang tour operators last Friday that the ministry would release the figures soon.

Despite changes in the tourism market, he is confident the target of 30 million tourists to visit Malaysia this year and RM10 billion (S\$3.32 billion) in tourism revenue can be achieved.

SIN CHEW DAILY/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Nigeria watchdog postpones elections

ABUJA • Nigeria's electoral watchdog yesterday postponed presidential and parliamentary elections for one week, citing logistical problems just hours before polls were due to open.

The two main political parties swiftly condemned the move and accused each other of orchestrating the delay as a way of manipulating the vote.

Presidential and parliamentary elections are now set for Feb 23, and governorship and state assembly elections have been pushed back to March 9, AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE



Mourners at the funeral for an Indian Central Reserve Police Force trooper in Agra yesterday. TV stations showed coffins wrapped in Indian flags being carried by thousands of people across their home towns after the bodies of the soldiers killed in the suicide bombing in Indian-administered Kashmir were flown to New Delhi last Friday. PHOTO: AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

Pence rebukes EU, rejects Merkel's call to work with Russia

MUNICH • US Vice-President Mike Pence yesterday rebuked European powers over Iran and Venezuela, in a renewed attack on Washington's traditional allies, rejecting a call by Germany's Chancellor to include Russia in global cooperation efforts.

Chancellor Angela Merkel had earlier issued a stark warning against abandoning international political structures, calling for treaties rejected by the United States to be rescued.

Describing the results of Mr Donald Trump's presidency as "remarkable" and "extraordinary", Mr Pence told European and Asian officials the EU should follow the US in

quitting the Iran nuclear deal.

"America is stronger than ever before and America is leading on the world stage once again," Mr Pence said at the Munich Security Conference, listing what he described as US foreign policy successes from Afghanistan to North Korea.

European leaders are troubled by Mr Trump's rhetoric, which they say is erratic and disruptive, citing his decision to pull out of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal as undermining an arms control agreement that prevented Teheran from developing a nuclear bomb.

But Mr Pence – who last week in a visit to Poland accused Britain, Germany and France of undermining

US sanctions on Iran – repeated his demand that European powers withdraw from the deal.

"The Iranian regime openly advocates another Holocaust and it seeks the means to achieve it," Mr Pence, who also visited the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz, told delegates at the conference.

Mr Pence also stepped up US pressure on Chinese telecoms gear companies such as Huawei, urging allies to avoid the firms and saying Chinese law requires them to give Beijing access to networks and data.

Huawei has repeatedly denied US-led allegations that its equipment could be used by Beijing for spying, and China's top diplomat

Yang Jiechi rejected Mr Pence's comments as he addressed the conference.

"Chinese law doesn't require companies to install back doors to collect intelligence," Mr Yang said.

Mr Pence, who used his trip to Europe to push Mr Trump's policy of favouring sovereign states as opposed to alliances and blocs, took aim at the EU, saying "once more the Old World can take a strong stand in support of freedom in the New World" in Venezuela.

"Today, we call on the European Union to step forward for freedom and recognise Juan Guaido as the only legitimate president of Venezuela," he said, calling Presi-

dent Nicolas Maduro a dictator who must step down.

His speech contrasted sharply with Dr Merkel's robust defence of Germany's foreign trade relations and ties with Russia, urging global leaders meeting in Munich to work together to tackle the world's problems. Speaking before Mr Pence, Dr Merkel questioned whether the US decision to leave the Iran nuclear deal and withdrawal from Syria was the best way to tackle Teheran in the region.

She also defended plans for a new natural gas pipeline from Russia to Germany that Mr Pence again criticised. Mr Trump has accused Germany of being a "captive" of Russia

due to its reliance on Russian energy, but Dr Merkel argued: "If during the Cold War... we imported large amounts of Russian gas, I don't know why times should be so much worse today..."

"Geostrategically, Europe can't have an interest in cutting off all relations with Russia," she added.

Separately, Singapore's Minister for Defence Ng Eng Hen met US Acting Secretary of Defence Patrick Shanahan in a bilateral call yesterday on the sidelines of the security conference. Both sides "discussed ways to enhance the defence cooperation between the two countries", the Ministry of Defence said in a statement. REUTERS, DPA

China's first big-budget sci-fi blockbuster hits jackpot

Patriotic local audiences hail first film to show Chinese saving the world

Chong Koh Ping
China Correspondent
In Shanghai

A disaster movie that saw Beijing and Shanghai inauspiciously destroyed has drawn millions of Chinese to the cinema, edging out the usual feel-good comedies or action flicks to top the box-office takings this Chinese New Year period.

Hailed as China's first big-budget sci-fi movie, *The Wandering Earth* earned 3.16 billion yuan (\$633 million) in 10 days, making it the country's fifth-highest grossing film.

Based on a novella by award-winning author Liu Cixin, the movie took four years and US\$50 million (\$68 million) to complete.

It tells of how Earth is about to be destroyed by a dying sun that is rapidly expanding. To escape the apocalypse, mankind decides to physically move the planet across the universe in search of a new solar system. But barely decades into the great 2,500-year migration, Earth finds itself on a collision path with Jupiter, only to be saved by a young Chinese man and his astronaut father.

For the first time, Chinese moviegoers are being treated to a story where their countrymen save the world, and they are full of pride.

"I grew up watching Hollywood sci-fi blockbusters, and this movie makes me begin to believe that oriental people can also save the Earth," said Mr Zhou Wenjun, 28, a civil servant who saw the movie with his friends in Hangzhou during the Chinese New Year holidays.

It is a movie that borrows the



The *Wandering Earth* earned \$633 million in 10 days, making it China's fifth-highest grossing film. Based on a novella by award-winning author Liu Cixin, the movie took four years and \$68 million to complete.
PHOTO: REUTERS

form and structure of Western sci-fi films but retains a strong Chinese flavour at its core, he added.

"The scenes of frozen Shanghai, Chinese New Year celebrations in the underground city, people playing mahjong, all sorts of Chinese dialects and even reminders from the Beijing traffic authorities are strong images showing Chinese people's feelings for their homeland. So it's a very China-centric movie at its core," he noted.

Mr Ge Xiaohu, 26, a postgraduate student in Shanghai, described it as a "localised sci-fi movie that is international at the same time".

"The Chinese elements are no longer just the embellishments in Hollywood movies," he said.

Besides having mass appeal, the movie has also been praised by film critics, experts and officials.

"It used to be that only Hollywood could make science fiction films, and now the Chinese can also do that... The *Wandering Earth* is not the end of Chinese science fiction movies, but a new beginning," said deputy inspector Lu Liang of the National Film Administration, a unit of the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda department.

The popularity of the movie follows the trend of recent box-office hits such as *Wolf Warrior 2* and *Operation Red Sea*, which portray China's power and stoke nationalistic sentiments among the people.

University of Macau film expert

Tan See Kam said Chinese movies have come a long way since the first mainland-made sci-fi film – *Death Ray on Coral Island* – in 1980. "In many ways, it is a huge achievement for the Chinese movie industry. For mainlanders, it's a source of nationalistic pride. No doubt about that," he told *The Sunday Times*. He was impressed by the stunning visuals, which exceeded his expectations.

But despite its resounding success in China, Professor Tan said the verdict is still out on whether the movie can do well on the international circuit. "Whether *The Wandering Earth* can travel far remains to be seen," he pointed out.

Agreeing, Beijing-based film dis-

tribution manager Marilyn Wong said the movie portrays patriotism and China's greatness a bit too strongly. Moreover, she noted that the main lead – Wu Jing of *Wolf Warrior 2* fame, a huge star in China – is relatively unknown outside of the domestic market.

She added: "The ideology of the movie is very different. In Hollywood, mankind, when faced with such a disaster, will leave Earth and find a new place... This concept of bringing the entire Earth with us because this is our land is a very interesting idea but very far-fetched."

"I don't think it will fly with overseas audiences."

kohping@sph.com.sg

China bans messaging apps for homework

BEIJING • Teachers in China will not be allowed to use the WeChat and QQ messaging apps to assign homework or ask parents to grade students' homework, the Ministry of Education said.

In a recent response to a proposal made at the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the ministry said it is the teachers' responsibility to grade students' homework and not the parents.

The ministry and seven other government departments issued a guideline last August to protect students' eyesight by curtailing the use of electronic devices to assign homework. Teachers should assign homework on paper only and limit the time they use electronic devices to teach, the guideline said.

But many schools rely heavily on WeChat groups and other mobile phone apps to give assignments. The practice poses a challenge to the country's goal of protecting children's eyesight and feeds parents' worries about their children becoming addicted to cellphones and the Internet.

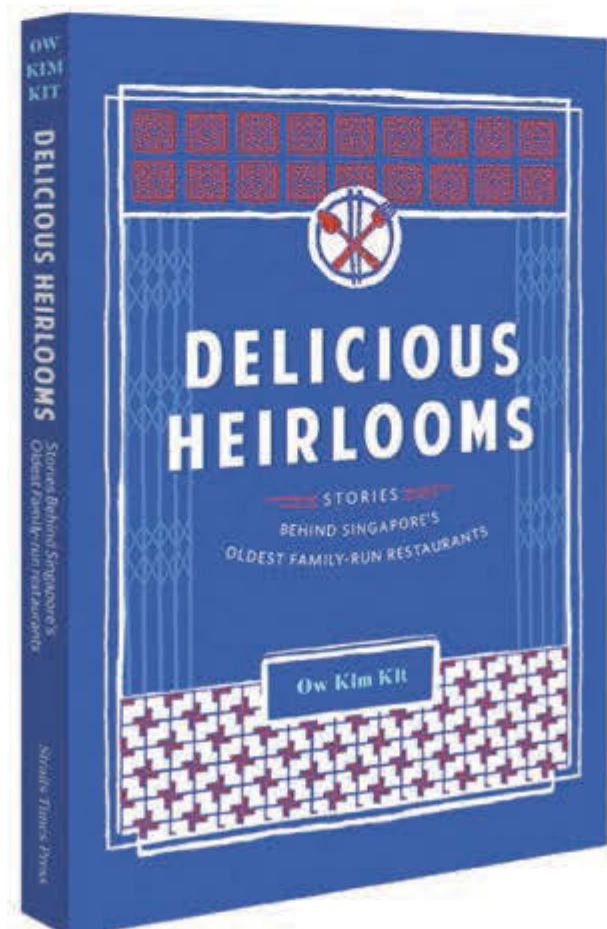
Liu Yanming, a sixth-grade student in Shanghai, uses his mother's cellphone to complete his homework, which is assigned on a piece of paper by his teacher. The completed assignment is then photographed and posted to a parent-teacher group on WeChat.

His father, Mr Liu Yong, is not pleased about this practice, saying: "He is just 12 years old and I do not want to buy him a cellphone. But it has become inevitable."

Senior researcher Chu Zhaozhui from the National Institute of Education Sciences said that although it is impossible to ban the use of electronic devices in the Internet era, students must be able to complete their homework without using them, so that those who cannot afford tablets, computers or smartphones can also do their work.

CHINA DAILY/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

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PARTICIPATION CRITERIA

1. Parent(s) or grandparents(s) and child(ren) must form a team of two to four members.
2. Participating children will have to be between 5 and 12 years of age.
3. Participating category is determined by the age of the oldest child in the team.
Category A : Kindergarten 1 - 2
Category B : Primary 1 - 2
Category C : Primary 3 - 6
4. All participants must be Singapore Citizens or Permanent Residents.

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Partner:



Supporters:



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Singapore woos India's millennial travellers

Nirmala Ganapathy
India Bureau Chief
In New Delhi

Singapore wants to attract Indian millennial tourists. And it is hoping a three-day festival will showcase to young Indians all that Singapore has to offer – from art and entertainment to a bustling nightlife.

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) has partnered with the St+art India Foundation, a non-profit

group, for the experiential festival, called Singapore Weekender, that started in New Delhi yesterday.

The festival includes works by a dozen Singaporean artists such as Samantha Lo and Daniel Yu, a pop-up cocktail bar by Jigger and Pony, and a performance by Singaporean rapper Yung Raja.

A road in central Delhi's Lodhi art district has been converted into "Singapore Lane" featuring street art by Singaporean artists like Eugene Soh and Yip Yew Chong.

STB's regional director (South Asia, Middle East and Africa) G. B. Srithar said: "We are trying to say art, entertainment and nightlife is something Singapore offers and they would be surprised to find that Singapore offers so many different types of experiences. It is one way of connecting with young adults."

Mr Srithar also noted that more than half of India's population is considered part of the millennial generation. "In recognition of the fact that 67 per cent of the Indian

population is under the age of 35, over the last few years we have started to look at this market of young adults... Their passion points and interests are very different."

Mr Chang Chee Pey, STB's assistant chief executive (international group), said: "India, given the size of its population and proximity to Singapore, will continue to be an important market for the Singapore Tourism Board."

"This is one example of how we are engaging with the new genera-

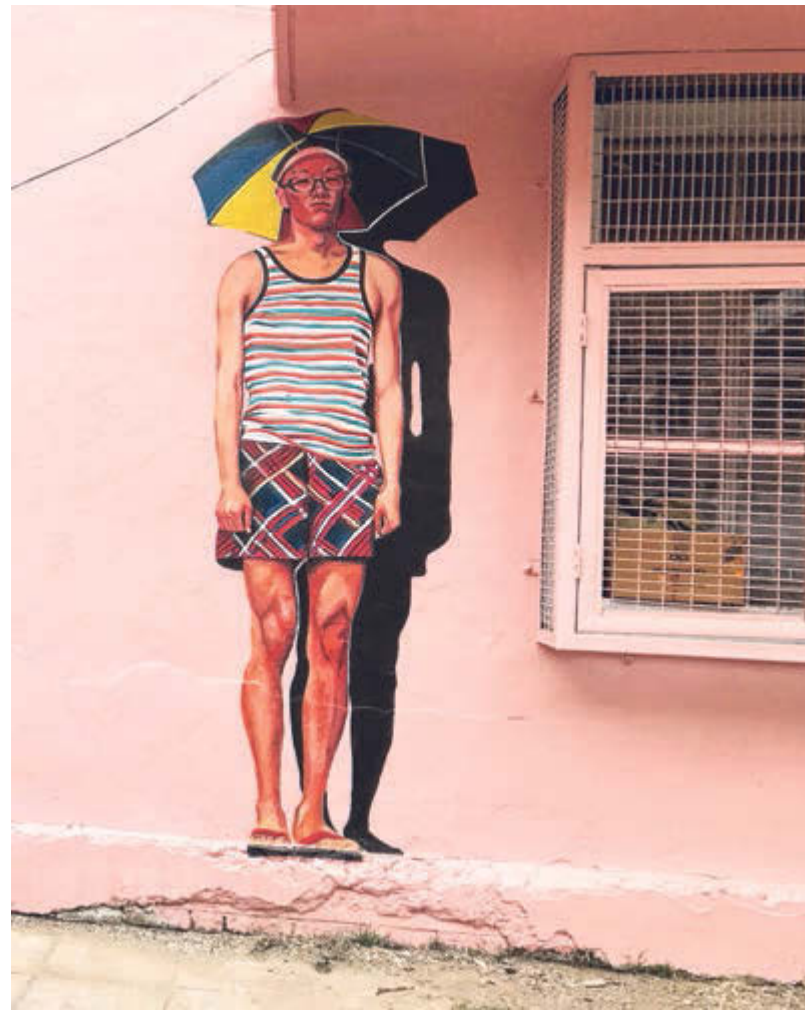
tion of Indian travellers."

Singapore remains a popular destination for Indian tourists.

According to STB, 1.45 million Indian tourists visited Singapore in 2018, a 13 per cent increase over the previous year, making India the third largest source of tourists after China and Indonesia.

Last year, Singapore saw 3.4 million visitors from China and three million from Indonesia.

gnirmala@sph.com.sg



A road in the Lodhi art district in New Delhi has been converted into "Singapore Lane" by the Republic's street artists as part of a three-day festival to promote travel to Singapore. ST PHOTOS: NIRMALA GANAPATHY

Weather

Singapore
24/34°C



Today

Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.

Outlook

Monday & Tuesday:
Afternoon thundery showers.

Air quality

PSI
38-53 (Moderate)
24-hour reading as of 8pm yesterday

 **Sunrise**
7.17am

 **Sunset**
7.21pm

 **Moonrise**
5.08pm

 **Moonset**
5.42am

North

Thunderstorm

South

Thunderstorm

East

Thunderstorm

West

Thunderstorm

Central

Thunderstorm

Tides

Today: 2.43am (1.7m), 8.41am (2.7m), 3.24pm (0.5m), 10.48pm (2.7m).

Tomorrow: 3.48am (1.6m), 9.41am (3m), 4.16pm (0.3m), 11.28pm (2.8m).

Boom in Indian exports to China, thanks to Sino-US trade war

China's shift to high-end tech also opens up opportunities, especially in agrarian sector

Debarshi Dasgupta
India Correspondent
In New Delhi

The simmering trade dispute between the United States and China has opened a window of opportunity for India, allowing it to boost its exports to China and reduce the yawning trade deficit it has with its largest trading partner.

A statement last week from the Department of Commerce noted that India was "poised to achieve its highest-ever" merchandise export figure to China in the 2018-19 financial year.

Between April and December last year, the value of Indian exports to China reached US\$12.7 billion (\$\$17.2 billion), close to the previous financial year's total figure of US\$13.33 billion. The Indian financial year ends in March. The previous high for Indian exports to China was US\$14.82 billion in the 2013-14 financial year.

India's imports from China hit US\$76.38 billion in 2017-18, leaving the country with a merchandise trade deficit of US\$63.05 billion. But imports for the period between April and December this fiscal year came to US\$53.9 billion, leaving a deficit of more than US\$40 billion.

India's Department of Commerce

said the increase in exports was the result of its efforts to identify specific sectors in China where the US lost its competitiveness because of increased tariffs. It said the growth in Indian exports has been led by marine products, organic chemicals, plastics, petroleum products, grapes and rice.

A report released earlier this month by the UN Conference on Trade and Development said India would emerge as one of the largest beneficiaries of the trade war between the US and China. It predicted a potential increase in Indian exports of US\$11 billion, around 3.5 per cent of the total value of the country's exports. Much of the increase was attributed to trade diversion to the US, with a smaller amount to China.

"The trade war will certainly provide greater market access in China but if this is to be sustained on a long-term basis, Indian firms will have to focus on improving their products' quality and pricing," said Dr Ajay Sahai, director-general and CEO of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations.

He told The Sunday Times that the increase in exports to China is not just because of the trade war but also a transition in the Chinese economy that Indian exporters must gear up to exploit once the



The growth in Indian exports to China has been led by marine products, organic chemicals, plastics, petroleum products, grapes and rice. PHOTO: REUTERS

trade-related tensions cool off.

"China is moving away from some of the more primary sectors that require a lot of human resources because it is short of manpower. It is also exiting these sectors to focus more on high-end technology and knowledge like artificial intelligence," he added.

This has opened up opportunities for Indian exports to China, especially in the agrarian sector, something the government is keen to exploit further. Discussions are on between New Delhi and Beijing on import quotas for sugar and rice for

A report released earlier this month by the UN said India would emerge as one of the largest beneficiaries of the trade war... It predicted a potential increase in Indian exports of US\$11 billion.

this year. India also expects to conclude the signing of protocols for the export of soya bean meal, cakes and pomegranates to China.

"I don't see China imposing non-tariff barriers even after the trade war ends because it will not have the domestic concern to limit imports. It, however, remains to be seen if India can fill that empty space," Dr Sahai said.

The Indian government has also been encouraging exporters to target the US market and exploit sectors where Chinese products have lost market share because of the increased tariffs. Indian merchandise exports to the US have grown. Between January and November last year, they amounted to US\$50.45 billion, surpassing 2017's value of US\$48.6 billion.

However, concerns remain about the negative impact of the trade war, most notably around its impact on global trade growth.

Dr Manoj Joshi, a distinguished fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, wrote that a possible dire outcome could be the "decoupling of the two economies into two mutually exclusive Chinese and American camps".

"Countries like India, which are not major players, could be forced to choose, but they will also be compelled to be part of this or that global value chain. A wrong choice will obviously have you on the losing side," he wrote.

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Marathon China-US trade talks making a final sprint, says Chinese state media

SHANGHAI • Chinese state media yesterday expressed cautious optimism over trade talks between the United States and China, a day after President Xi Jinping said a week of discussions in Beijing had produced "step-by-step" progress.

Mr Xi made the comments at a meeting on Friday with US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, after a week of talks at the senior and deputy levels.

The People's Daily, the official paper of the ruling Communist Party, said in a commentary that Mr Xi's

meeting with US negotiators had affirmed progress made in previous talks and "injected new impetus into the next stage of the development of Sino-US trade relations".

The talks "have made important progress" for the next round of negotiations in Washington next week, the paper said in its domestic edition. "It is hoped the two sides will maintain the good momentum of the current consultations and strive to reach an agreement within the set time limit," it added.

US duties on US\$200 billion (\$\$271 billion) in imports from

China are set to rise to 25 per cent from 10 per cent if there is no deal by March 1 to address US demands that China curb forced technology transfers and better enforce intellectual property rights.

In its overseas edition, the People's Daily said "zero-sum thinking and games where you lose and I win can only create losses for both. Only on a basis of mutual respect and equal treatment, through dialogue and consultation, can we find a solution acceptable to both sides".

An English-language editorial in

the Global Times, which is published by the People's Daily, said news that China had consulted on the text of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) "shows the two sides have made unprecedented progress".

"The MOU and next week's talks both show that the seemingly endless China-US trade negotiations, like a marathon, are making a final sprint," it said.

The newspapers cautioned that any trade agreement reached would have to be in the interests of both countries.

"There are still obstacles to be overcome, and no one should underestimate how daunting a task the two sides face trying to resolve all the differences that have long existed between them in one clean sweep," the official English-language China Daily said in an editorial. REUTERS

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Kim 'ready to accept dismantling of nuke plant'

Seoul adviser says N. Korea's leader assured South's President of willingness over move

SEOUL • North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is ready to accept the dismantlement and inspection of a high-profile nuclear plant, a South Korean presidential adviser has said, suggesting a possible point of compromise in upcoming talks with US President Donald Trump.

Mr Moon Chung-in, a special adviser for foreign affairs and national security, said in an interview last Friday that the verified destruction of the North's Yongbyon nuclear complex was an achievable goal during Mr Trump's planned Feb 27-28 summit with Mr Kim.

The North Korean leader will arrive in Vietnam on Feb 25, three sources with knowledge of his schedule told Reuters yesterday. Mr Trump and Mr Kim are to meet in Hanoi, following their historic

first meeting in Singapore last June. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last Thursday said Washington aims to "get as far down the road as we can" at the summit.

Mr Kim will meet Vietnamese officials when he arrives in Hanoi, said the sources, who requested anonymity, citing the sensitivity and secrecy surrounding the movements of the North's leader. He will also visit the Vietnamese manufacturing base of Bac Ninh and the industrial port town of Hai Phong.

Vietnam's President and general secretary of the ruling Communist Party, Mr Nguyen Phu Trong, will meet Mr Kim, according to one of the sources.

A Reuters witness saw Mr Kim's de facto chief of staff Kim Chang Son in Hanoi yesterday, visiting a



North Koreans paying their respects in Pyongyang yesterday before the statues of their late leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il as part of celebrations marking the latter's birthday. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

government guesthouse and the Metropole and Melia hotels in the centre of the capital.

"Kim Jong Un said 'yes' and will accept verification," Mr Moon told Bloomberg in Seoul on Friday.

He said it was his "understanding" that South Korean President Moon Jae-in got Mr Kim's personal assurance on that when they met in Pyongyang in September.

"I hope President Trump can nail it down that verification should be part of the permanent dismantling of nuclear facilities in Yongbyon."

While Mr Kim expressed a willingness to accept the "permanent dismantlement" of Yongbyon during the South Korean leader's visit, his public statements stopped short of committing to "verification", which would allow inspectors insight into his weapons capabilities.

Mr Moon Chung-in, who participated in the trip, declined to say where he got the information. He is not related to the President.

Yongbyon used to be the crown jewel of North Korea's nuclear arms programme, with its reactor and re-

processing plant turning out enough plutonium for about one bomb a year. That role has shrunk since North Korea switched to uranium enrichment for the bulk of its fissile material, carrying out the work in secret, according to anti-proliferation experts.

Mr Moon Chung-in said the US should agree to allow economic projects between the two Koreas to proceed in exchange for inspections of Yongbyon – something the US has so far been reluctant to do.

Mr Kim has railed against the in-

ternational sanctions regime choking his moribund economy and called for resuming the projects, including an industrial park and a mountain resort.

"Those will be doable," Mr Moon Chung-in said. Such an exchange would advance talks, "without undermining the overall sanctions regime by the UN Security Council, yet giving some kind of incentives to North Korea in a way the US can come up with some sort of compromise", he added.

BLOOMBERG, REUTERS

Amazon says 'dehumanising' work conditions claim untrue

WASHINGTON • A senior Amazon executive has disputed claims raised by US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez that the company's workers face "dehumanising conditions", and invited her to take a tour of the firm's facilities.

The newly elected progressive Democrat was an outspoken critic of

plans to locate Amazon's second headquarters in a New York City neighbourhood near her congressional district. Ms Ocasio-Cortez asked on Twitter if Amazon's culture of "strict performance" is why its "workers have to urinate in bottles & work while on food stamps to meet 'targets'?" She added: "Perfor-

mance shouldn't come at the cost of dehumanising conditions."

She cited a Newsweek story last September that raised those claims.

Mr Dave Clark, Amazon's senior vice-president of worldwide operations, responded on Twitter on Friday that the claims "simply aren't true. We are proud of our jobs with

excellent pay (\$15 min), benefits from day 1 & lots of other benefits like our Career Choice pre-paid educational programs".

He invited her to take a tour of Amazon's operations. A spokesman for Ms Ocasio-Cortez did not respond to a request for comment.

Ms Ocasio-Cortez was among pro-

gressive New York Democrats who objected to the US\$2.8 billion (S\$3.8 billion) in incentives from the city and New York state to woo Amazon to build a new headquarters in Queens. Amazon abruptly cancelled the plan on Thursday.

"When the community wanted to negotiate, Amazon said 'all or nothing'.

They bailed when they didn't get 100% of what they wanted," Ms Ocasio-Cortez tweeted.

"Google came into NYC just fine. Amazon wanted to be Foxconn."

Taiwan-based Foxconn Technology won US\$4 billion in state and local incentives from Wisconsin in exchange for a promise to build a US\$10 billion development. It said this month it would still build a factory in Wisconsin even as it shifts more of the focus of the investment away from manufacturing. REUTERS

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Sport



Sportsmen get more say
SNOC Athletes' Commission chairman Mark Chay says aye to more such committees.

A27

I JUST REALLY HATE TO LOSE: IKEE

Athletes, officials and public rally behind leukaemia-stricken swimmer, who vows to return

If there was any doubt that Japan swimmer Rikako Ikee is the poster girl for the Olympics in her home town next year, they were quashed in the days that followed her leukaemia revelation last week.

The Japan Marrow Donor Program, which receives an average 5.6 requests for information on its website daily, saw a surge to 270 last Tuesday, when the 18-year-old announced her diagnosis on Twitter, according to The Japan Times.

"I think these (messages) give hope to not only me but also to those who are going through something difficult like me," the butterfly and freestyle swimmer wrote on Twitter.

Japan's Olympics Minister Yoshitaka Sakurada had to apologise after his initial reactions to her diagnosis were seen as insensitive.

He had told local media: "She is a potential gold medallist, an athlete in whom we have great expectations. I'm really disappointed."

"When one person leads, she can boost the whole team. I am slightly

worried that this type of excitement could wane."

Ikee was born on July 4, 2000, by underwater birth in the bathroom at home – her mother did not want a hospital birth – in the Edogawa ward of Tokyo.

She began swimming before she was four, and could swim the 50m freestyle, backstroke and butterfly when she was five.

Her talent was apparent as she rose through the junior ranks – she set the 100m butterfly record of 1min 2.30sec at the Tokyo Dolphin Club Edogawa Swimming School when she was in the sixth grade, a record that still stands today.

She made headlines when she qualified for the 2015 Fina World Championships in Kazan at age 14.

Later that same year, Ikee left her footprint at the OCBC Aquatic Centre, where she won two golds, a silver and a bronze at the World Junior Championships.

Among her victories in Singapore was her win in the girls' 50m butterfly, in a championship record of 26.28 seconds.

It was the first time in nine years that an Asian won a 50m event of any discipline at the prestigious junior meet, and the 1.71m swimmer had beaten taller swimmers such as Canada's Penny Oleksiak and Russia's Mariia Kameneva to the gold.

Then, she had told The New Paper: "I don't think it was my best swim today, I have done better in training and I can do better in the future."

"I will just keep on building myself up to be more powerful," added Ikee, whose demure looks belied her fearless nature.

She built on the 2015 meets by qualifying for four individual events and three relays at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, where she finished sixth in the women's 100m fly.

She became a bona fide star in Jakarta last year, when she claimed six gold medals – including four individual titles – to earn the Most Valuable Player accolade, a first for a female athlete at the Asiad.

"I still haven't won a world title so that's my next goal," she said then.

Her fairy-tale run came to an abrupt end last Tuesday, and that world-title dream would have to wait, following her diagnosis.

Fellow athletes and even International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach sent her messages of support thereafter.

Using the official Olympic Twitter account, he wrote: "Wishing you all the best for your recovery. Joining with all your millions of fans to

send you all my best wishes. Now just concentrate on getting better!"

The Japan Times reported Ikee is now hospitalised and doctors believe her cancer is at an early stage.

She will skip the Japan National Championships in April, and the world championships in Gwangju, South Korea, in July, and her Olympic dream is now in doubt, as Japan Swimming Federation vice-chairman Koji Ueno said: "We're not considering any special (qualifying) exemptions for her. An extremely difficult path lies ahead, but I hope people will warmly watch over her so she can return to competition at (next year's) qualifiers for the Tokyo Olympics."

But Ikee, like a true champion, is refusing to be beaten, in the water or by the disease.

"I will devote myself to my treatment and strive to be able to show an even stronger Rikako Ikee," she said last Tuesday.

"Pressure for me is something I thrive on. There will be a lot of Japanese fans cheering for me at the Tokyo Olympics in my home city – maybe even some from overseas too – and that's going to give me great strength."

"The more fans that come, the stronger I'll be. When it comes to swimming, I just really hate to lose."



SINGAPORE, 2015 (left): A 15-year-old Rikako Ikee won the 50m and 100m fly at the World Junior Championships. THE NEW PAPER FILE PHOTO



JAKARTA, 2018: Ikee with her 50m free gold, one of six she won at the Asian Games. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

NO GIVING UP

I will devote myself to my treatment and strive to be able to show an even stronger Rikako Ikee.



RIKAKO IKEE, 18, Japanese swimmer, on her intention to beat leukaemia and qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Joseph Schooling at the Singapore Swim Series at the OCBC Aquatic Centre yesterday, when he won the 100m butterfly. He feels motivated with no distractions as he embarks on his preparations for July's World Championships and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, where he will defend his title. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG



Schooling counts down to world c'ships, Olympics

Wang Meng Meng

Joseph Schooling's 53.16sec effort in the men's 100m butterfly yesterday at the Singapore Swim Series, in his first meet since returning from the US on Monday, is far from his Olympic-winning 50.39 effort.

But it signified the start of the final – and most crucial – 17 months towards next July's Tokyo Olympics, where the 23-year-old aims to retain the 100m fly crown he won in Rio three years ago.

While Schooling will be mostly

based in Singapore, his coaches here are finalising a road map of training camps and competitions to give the swimming star the best possible preparation.

National Training Centre head coach Gary Tan said: "Right now, we are talking through the plan all the way up to the Olympics, not just the World Championships (in Gwangju, South Korea)."

"We're working on different elements in every single day of practice. The most important thing is to nail down the small details with Jo."

"We got different people work-

ing on different things – (national head coach) Stephan (Widmer) on the technical part, I'm on the overall scheme of training and (technical director) Sonya (Porter) is helping out with the planning."

Tan added that the list of training camps will be confirmed in the coming week, with Japan or a neighbouring country a likely destination.

For his part, the leaner-looking Schooling feels he has the physical foundation and mental footing to work towards the Olympics.

While he was 86kg at his heaviest at the 2017 SEA Games, he now

weighs 75kg and believes an additional 2-3kg to his 1.84m frame before July's World Championships will be his optimum shape.

"My strength coach has been doing a phenomenal job getting my body right. We just changed my whole weight routine. All these changes have been the product of six, seven months of work. This kind of change in that amount of time excites me," said Schooling, who won the 100m fly event yesterday, ahead of Teong Tzen Wei (54.45) and Ong Jun Yi (54.68).

And despite it being a local meet,

he took the event seriously – he was already sipping a protein drink as he warmed down in the training pool, and religiously dipped himself in the ice bath to flush lactic acid out of his system.

He said: "It's just all swimming from here; no distractions. I feel different, I feel motivated."

"We got 17 more months, let's see what we can do. From now to Tokyo, there are no stops. We have a path that we are going to take and we are not going to stray off it."

meng@sph.com.sg

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4423 5463 6857

7198 7932 9357

9901

CONSOLATIONS

1784 2902 5019

5595 5781 6581

6674 8016 8378

9770



Singapore silat exponents Sheik Farhan (right) and Shakir Juanda kissing Singapore Silat Federation chief executive Sheik Alau'ddin after winning world titles in Bali in December 2016. Shakir, head of Persisi's athletes' commission that was formed last year, says there have been more exchanges and less segregation between the older and younger exponents. PHOTO: PERSISI

Panels give athletes a bigger voice

Growing number of national sports associations' commissions are useful to:

- Tackle wider range of issues
- Serve as link to management
- Cut down on miscommunication

Nicole Chia

Before the Singapore Silat Federation (Persisi) athletes' commission was formed last year, there was little interaction between the junior and senior athletes.

Since the commission was set up last April, however, its chairman Shakir Juanda has noticed that there has been more exchanges and less segregation between both groups.

This is one benefit the 30-year-old feels the formation of the athletes' commission has yielded.

Persisi chief executive Sheik Alau'ddin also believes there have been improvements as a result. These include a stronger mutual understanding between athletes and the management committee, and a clearer perspective of selection criteria by its athletes.

"I've told Shakir (the athletes) must understand there are policies that they cannot (override) and there is selection criteria that cannot be overruled," said Sheik, who was part of the Singapore National Olympic Council's (SNOC) Athletes' Commission from 2003 to 2009.

"Sometimes athletes want more recognition and opportunities... we've explained these things to them many times but sometimes hearing it from another athlete is so much better."

Persisi is one of several national sports associations (NSAs) that set up such commissions last year. Others include the Singapore Badminton Association, Singapore Table Tennis Association (STTA) and Singapore Athletics.

These commissions aim to represent the voice of athletes in their respective NSAs.

Each member of the 10-strong Persisi athletes' commission meet with different groups of athletes, and the committee convenes every three months to discuss any concerns that should be raised to the management committee (MC).

Shakir, a national athlete for over a decade, said: "We are the bridge between the athletes and the man-

agement committee... if we see that the (athletes' concerns) are things we can handle, we'll give them advice but if it's beyond our means, we'll bring it up to the MC.

"We have to work together, and this also lessens the chances of miscommunication."

The SNOC Athletes' Commission was formed in 2003 and its current chairman, Mark Chay, hopes that more NSAs form such committees within their respective sports.

The former national swimmer said that it can sometimes be difficult for the SNOC athletes' commission to mediate when such disagreements concerning selection criteria arise, for example, as its members may not be familiar with the technical aspects of the various sports.

"If NSAs decide to take a more inclusive approach to the selection criteria and have athlete representation within them so that this can be sounded out maybe a year or more in advance, that will be more productive," added Chay, who is serving his second term after his first stint from 2014 to 2017.

The STTA's five-member committee, formed in October, is headed by former national paddler Isabelle Li, and includes current players such as Ethan Poh and Zhang Wanling.

Li, 24, hailed the board as a "great step forward" in complementing STTA's efforts to support paddlers.

She said: "I'm familiar with the challenges and issues encountered along the (athletes') journey and the resources available to overcome these challenges.

"That being said, the team (also) consist of young up-and-coming paddlers (Poh and Zhang) who will be able to give valuable input on the kind of support the current batch of paddlers want, and to represent their voices."

Former sailor Ben Tan, an Olympian who was chairman of the first SNOC athletes' commission, feels such committees are becoming more recognised in the Singapore sporting landscape.

"If you wanted to review the MAP awards last time, you

wouldn't think of consulting the athletes' commission because there wasn't one. Later on when one was formed, you might occasionally forget it's there because it's new," he said.

"Now, it's become the SOP (standard operating procedure) to consult them and I see them more often at events, meetings and functions. For example, when you organise events (like) the Singapore Sports Awards, there is a table for members of the athletes' commission."

But Tan, who was also president of Singapore Sailing from 2010-2018, stressed that the commission was not a union.

"You are there to add value, to hear the athletes' concerns and counsel the athletes to articulate their concerns better. Sometimes we escalate it on their behalf because we are in a better position (to do so)," he added.

"We are there as a third party to give an objective perspective... if you take the athletes' side for the sake of it, you're going to lose credibility. If you start out and people think you're a union, whenever you escalate anything, you'll automatically be shut out."

In recent times, the SNOC athletes' commission has had to step up in high-profile disputes in local sports.

Former national water polo player Yip Ren Kai, who was SNOC commission's chairman before Chay, was selected by the SNOC and Sport Singapore as team manager of the 2017 SEA Games athletics contingent. This was to ensure that the track and field athletes' Games preparations were not jeopardised by officials' often public bickering.

That same year, Yip was also present at a mediation session where national marathoner Soh Rui Yong was given a formal warning for breaching regulations regarding the promotion of personal sponsors during the blackout period before the SEA Games.

He said: "During my term (the objective) was more to raise the profile of the athletes' commission and get it out there, and one of the objectives was also to push for the NSAs to have one of their own."

"I would say that most athletes know about the athletes' commission so it's really about going into the next step of engaging the athletes."

To Chay, the range of issues that the SNOC athletes' commission can help with has widened.

Noting that issues in the past were mostly related to selection policies and procedures, he believes more common problems faced by athletes today involve social media, cyberbullying, mental health and careers after sport.

The SNOC athletes' commission is organising a forum for athletes next month, and it will touch on the athletes' rights, roles and responsibilities, said Chay.

He added: "I think athletes nowadays have different issues - they are given different options and (more) resources, and with those resources they also have a lot more responsibility and pressure."

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PEER REVIEW

Sometimes athletes want more recognition and opportunities... we've explained these things to them many times but sometimes hearing it from another athlete is so much better.



SHEIK ALAU'DDIN, silat federation chief executive.

FRESH PERSPECTIVE

I'm familiar with the challenges and issues encountered along the (athletes') journey and the resources available to overcome these challenges. That being said, the team (also) consist of young up-and-coming paddlers who will be able to give valuable input on the kind of support the current batch of paddlers want, and to represent their voices.



ISABELLE LI, who heads the STTA's athletes' committee.

KNOW WHERE YOU STAND

We are there as a third party to give an objective perspective... if you take the athletes' side for the sake of it, you're going to lose credibility. If you start out and people think you're a union, whenever you escalate anything, you'll automatically be shut out.



BEN TAN, chairman of the first SNOC athletes' commission.

A Game of Two Halves

Sazali Abdul Aziz and David Lee discuss the future of under-pressure Maurizio Sarri and the impact of young football coaches in Singapore: <http://str.sg/oEgC>



TIME FOR SANCHEZ, LUKAKU TO SHINE

With Martial, Lingard injured, Solskjaer challenges misfiring duo to show their worth

LONDON • Caretaker boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has challenged Alexis Sanchez and Romelu Lukaku to step up for Manchester United after confirming that the injured Anthony Martial and Jesse Lingard will be out for up to three weeks.

Forwards Martial and Lingard were forced off during last Tuesday's 2-0 Champions League last-16, first-leg home defeat by Paris Saint-Germain with groin and hamstring problems respectively.

At a press conference ahead of tomorrow's FA Cup fifth-round clash with Chelsea, Solskjaer said: "It is a chance for anyone who plays, whether it is Alexis, Romelu or Angel (Gomes)."

If Martial and Lingard are out for three weeks, they will also miss the crucial Premier League match against Liverpool, and face a race against time to make the second leg at PSG on March 6.

Their injuries come as a setback for United, who have won 10 out of their 12 matches under Solskjaer.

Asked whether this was perfect timing for Sanchez and Lukaku, who have fallen down the pecking order, Solskjaer said: "Yeah, it might be.

"We've got forward options but Angel Gomes and Tahith Chong have also been training with us all week so there's a big chance they'll be involved.

"Anthony and Jesse have done really well for us; they're vital.

"But then again with Romelu and Alexis, they've got different skill sets and will be able to show what they can do so we need to gel a team together for Monday."

Sanchez again struggled to make

an impact off the bench against PSG but Solskjaer insisted it is up to the Chilean to show he is worth the highly lucrative 4½-year contract he earned when he joined from Arsenal just over a year ago.

He has scored only five goals in 37 appearances for United, but did find the net for just the second time this season in their last FA Cup match, a 3-1 win at Arsenal when he linked up well with Lukaku.

The Belgian and Sanchez are expected to start alongside the in-form Marcus Rashford tomorrow.

Solskjaer is also confident his players can recover quickly from the defeat by PSG to inflict more damage on a Chelsea side who were thrashed 6-0 in the Premier League by Manchester City last weekend.

The Blues, however, have bounced back with a 2-1 win at Malmo in the Europa League last-32, first leg on Thursday.

"The defeat is a different feel of course. I hate losing games, and it seems like the boys hate losing games," Solskjaer added.

"They've been down but there's no point dwelling on it because there are big games against good teams coming up and we need to dust ourselves down and get going again on Monday.

"You've got to bounce back at this club.

"You will always have challenges and away against Chelsea is one of the tougher challenges."

THE GUARDIAN, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

CHELSEA V MANCHESTER UNITED
Singtel TV Ch111, Tuesday, 3.30am



The emergence of an invigorated Manchester United attack has seen Alexis Sanchez (far left) and Romelu Lukaku fall down the pecking order. PHOTO: REUTERS

5

Alexis Sanchez has scored just five goals in 37 appearances for United

HeartOfFootball

FA Cup lustre gone since United threw it away



Rob Hughes

Chelsea and Manchester United going for their last hope of glory this season might have been a reason for Singaporeans to sit up, or get up, at 3.30 in the morning to view the game.

Alas, the word "might" is the most significant one in that sentence.

If we believed the FA Cup still had its lustre, or if big clubs put out their best 11 to try to win it, Monday's game at Stamford Bridge might be worth losing sleep over.

But the old trophy, the template for cups around the world, is now treated like a nuisance by owners who, in the case of Chelsea and United, live in different time zones and observe the "game" through the prism of money.

The writing was on the wall 20 years ago when United, then the FA Cup holders, declined to defend it the next season. They might as

well have tossed the silverware into the Manchester Ship Canal.

The Football Association Challenge Cup, the original title from 1871, was bartered away in a shabby deal cut between then United chairman Martin Edwards, his manager Alex Ferguson, and interim chief executive of the Football Association, David Davies.

The FA thought (wrongly) that it could win votes towards England hosting the 2006 World Cup by persuading United to sacrifice the FA Cup and travel instead to Brazil for the so-called Fifa World Club Championship in the middle of the English season in January, 2000.

United went out in the first round of that tournament dominated by home sides. Corinthians beat Vasco da Gama on penalty kicks after a goalless final.

Any promise of votes proved illusory. Germany won the hosting rights, with England crying foul after being eliminated with just two votes from that fine body of men, the Fifa executive committee.

Trying to impress those 24 men through gestures like abandoning the FA Cup was naive.

We now know, but we more than suspected then, that Fifa's committee had crooked men stuffing their pockets with bribes.

The FA Cup has never been the same since.

Of course, as every Newport County fan will tell you, there is still glorious fun in knocking over Middlesbrough on a wet Tuesday night in Wales.

And there are even die-hard followers of Chelsea and United hoping that, with Spurs and Arsenal and Liverpool eliminated,

this could be their time to salvage a glorious end to a difficult season.

Some even believe that victory at the Bridge might keep Maurizio Sarri in the Chelsea hot seat, or persuade United to stop dallying and hand Ole Gunnar Solskjaer the manager job permanently.

They are wide of the mark. Sarri's last hope is to somehow guide Chelsea into next season's Champions League, which looks remote after the Blues' shocking 4-0 defeat at Bournemouth and 6-0 surrender at Manchester City.

Word is that Chelsea players are confused, some even disillusioned, by Sarriball and that owner Roman Abramovich, facing United Kingdom visa woes, is itching to fire yet another manager.

Sarri says he will stand or fall on his "romantic" football.

Whether Maurizio Sarri or Ole Gunnar Solskjaer pick their strongest sides for the FA Cup, or keep some powder dry for the battle for fourth place in the league, we may not know until just before kick off. But whatever fans think, the thrill the Cup brings is a pittance compared to big European rewards which the owners think about.

Rumours have it that Eden Hazard will line up for Real Madrid next season, and N'Golo Kante is coveted by Paris St-Germain in his home city.

So a total rebuild awaits the next man in Abramovich's revolving door.

United? The Glazer brothers are, like all of us, enamoured by the way Solskjaer has put charm back into the club that Jose Mourinho flattened with his sour self egotism.

Club accounts have shown that Mourinho and his aides were paid £19.6 million (\$\$34.27 million) to leave United, just as they were twice paid millions to get the hell out of Chelsea. But Solskjaer's incredible start of 10 wins and a draw ended last Wednesday when PSG outplayed his team at Old Trafford.

Solskjaer refused to use the excuse that first-half injuries to Anthony Martial and Jesse Lingard robbed him of essential pace and penetration.

He spoke of climbing back up the mountain, but Solskjaer could see (we all could) that the marvellous potential of Marcus Rashford is way behind the World Cup-winning young man from France, Kylian Mbappe.

Whether Sarri or Solskjaer pick their strongest sides for the FA Cup, or keep some powder dry for the battle for fourth place in the league, we may not know until kick off. But whatever fans think, the thrill the Cup brings is a pittance compared to big European rewards which the owners think about.

The day United discarded the FA Cup, its relevance sadly faded.

stsports@sph.com.sg

Khan eyes rebound win for unborn son

Sazali Abdul Aziz

When local mixed martial arts fighter Amir Khan steps into the ring at One Championship's Call To Greatness event at the Singapore Indoor Stadium on Friday, he will not be fighting for just himself.

With his wife Cristina Leontyeva due to deliver the couple's first child next month, he is eyeing a triumph over Ariel Sexton in their lightweight (up to 77kg) Grand Prix quarter-final match to set him on the path to success in the sport and a brighter future for his son.

Asked what fatherhood meant to him, Amir told The Sunday Times: "It gives me extra motivation. Every fight I take part in will affect my career, and the more successful I am, the more I can provide my son with opportunities in life.

"If I make it, he has a better life, and that's all I want."

After a pause, the 24-year-old added with a smirk: "Maybe that, and for him to be able to say: 'Daddy was a world champion'. I want him to be proud of his dad and be able to show off to his friends."

One does not disclose fighters' purses but its atomweight world champion Angela Lee makes a guaranteed six-figure sum per fight, excluding bonuses. Budding fighters may get about \$1,300 per fight.

This is the first time a Grand Prix tournament is being held in One Championship, and former Ultimate Fighting Championship star Eddie Alvarez is among the eight fighters in the mix.

Amir earned his long-awaited title shot last November, but fell



short. Before a partisan 15,000-strong crowd in Manila, he showed plenty of heart and pushed veteran Filipino fighter Eduard Folayang, 34, to the distance but lost via unanimous decision after five rounds.

Amir, who has 11 wins and four losses in his professional career, candidly admitted he was second-

best on the night, and that Folayang's well-executed game plan exposed "a lot of holes" in his game.

He returned to the gym after just a week's rest, after he received the call to face Costa Rican jiu-jitsu specialist Sexton (12 wins, four losses). The 37-year-old noted Amir is a "very dangerous striker" but be-

lieves his experience makes him a more well-rounded fighter.

"It's going to be a wild fight, it's going to be fun, and I know that I'll come out with my submission," Sexton said on One's website.

Former Muay Thai fighter Amir, whose strength lies in his striking ability, has other ideas though.

"He's targeting a submission, I'm targeting a knockout, so we'll see whose prediction will come true on Friday."

msazali@sph.com.sg

• Tickets: www.sportshub.com.sg/ONEChampionship

Amir Khan training at Evolve MMA last Thursday. He will face Costa Rican jiu-jitsu specialist Ariel Sexton in One Championship's Call To Greatness event at the Singapore Indoor Stadium on Friday. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM



SUNWOLVES OUT OF STEAM, FALL AGAIN

Japan side lose to South Africa's Sharks, their fourth Super Rugby season-opening defeat in a row

Xener Gill

The Sunwolves continued their unwanted run of losing all their opening games in four Super Rugby seasons with their 45-10 loss to the Sharks last night at the National Stadium.

Showing good teamwork and precise passing before a 4,967 crowd, the Japanese side started strong, scoring their first try and conversion by the eighth minute.

But the Sharks, with a size advantage, stepped up and pushed

through the Sunwolves' defence, levelling the tie at 10-10 in the 16th minute.

The South African side went on to score another five tries and conversions to win 45-10.

Sunwolves coach Scott Hansen said: "As a coach, I'm really proud of the effort. The boys took care of each other even though they were out of steam."

"The challenge for us is to grow our game so we've got to operate at a high tempo. We didn't quite get it right and at times we put ourselves under pressure due to that."

When asked about the Sunwolves' weaker scrums, forward and captain Craig Millar said: "We were under pressure at times, for various reasons, so we need to learn how to handle those situations better."

"We were up against a very experienced front row and it's great learning from them and we'll work hard to get a few things right for our next match."

While there has been talk about the Sunwolves being kicked out of the competition due to their dismal results in the last three seasons, Hansen remains optimistic and is not putting any pressure on the players.

"The boys won't be under any pressure from me. I'm proud of them," he said.

"We're growing a game and we'll get better at it. We're looking out for each other and that's our focus."

"There was some outstanding defence we saw from the boys. We got the ball back a lot through our defence and we were allowed to attack from there. The boys physi-

cally managed to dominate the collisions and that's what we seek - to grow our defence around that so that it will be better for our tempo."

Despite the comfortable win, Sharks head coach Robert du Preez said the Sunwolves were "always a tough side to play against because you never know quite what to expect at times".

He added: "They really had us in trouble in the first 20 minutes, especially with their defensive line."

The Sunwolves face the New South Wales Waratahs in Tokyo next Saturday and return to the National Stadium on March 23 for the match against South Africa's Lions.

xenerg@sph.com.sg

• Sunwolves-Lions tickets on sale: www.sportshub.com.sg/SuperRugby

Sunwolves flanker Hendrik Tui (left), lock Luke Thompson (centre) and hooker Jaba Bregvadze (second right) tackling the Sharks players during their Super Rugby match at the National Stadium last night. The Sharks won 45-10. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

Dunks and steals as rising stars thrill



Team USA forward Kyle Kuzma dunking the ball as Team World forward Cedi Osman looks on during the Rising Stars game in Charlotte. PHOTO: REUTERS

LOS ANGELES • A glorified scrimmage, a no-defence charade - call it the National Basketball Association Rising Stars game, or whatever you want, but it certainly was one thing: Exciting as all heck.

With a game-high 35 points from Los Angeles Lakers forward Kyle Kuzma and another 30 from Boston Celtics wing Jayson Tatum, Team USA defeated Team World 161-144 on Friday night in the first NBA All-Star Weekend event.

But the score mattered less than the sensational plays and displays of athleticism on the court at Charlotte's Spectrum Centre.

With the first five picks in the 2018 NBA draft all participating in the same game, it was a night to celebrate the best and brightest young stars in the league.

The game at least remained close through the first three quarters. But by the middle of the fourth quarter, Team USA had pulled away for good and the real circus shots started coming out.

Slam dunks and three-pointers were the order of the day and defence disappeared completely as Kuzma was named MVP (Most Valuable Player) of the contest which featured the league's top first- and second-year players.

He went 15-of-27 from the field and also had six rebounds.

The teams combined for 37 three-pointers, 55 dunks and shot a total of just 12 free throws.

"Last year, the World team kicked our butts," Kuzma said. "They came in here and beat us by 30 (World won 155-124). A lot of us kind of remembered that."

"I played in this game last year and was really lackadaisical. I didn't want to do that again."

Atlanta's Trae Young finished with 25 points and 10 assists, Sacramento's De'Aaron Fox had 16 assists and Utah's Donovan Mitchell added 20 points and nine assists for Team USA.

Ben Simmons, of the Philadelphia 76ers, led the opposition with 28 points. Chicago's Lauri Markkanen had 21 points and Dallas' Luka Doncic had 13 points and nine assists for the World Team, whose players came from 10 different nations.

Rookie guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander of Canada added 15 points.

"As you can see, not much defence. Guys just want to get up and play," guard Simmons said. "It's good to get out there and just get up and down with guys you don't normally go up and down with."

This was the fifth year of the Americans-against-World format and the World now lead the series 3-2.

The NBA All-Star game between Team LeBron and Team Giannis will take place at the same venue today.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, DPA

5 TEAM WORLD
Deandre Ayton
Luka Doncic
TEAM USA
Marvin Bagley III
Jaren Jackson Jr
Trae Young

NBA Draft 2018 top picks

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS				
Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Sun, 17 Feb 2019				
A League	Sydney FC	Central Coast	2.00pm	LW
Spanish League	Real Madrid	Girona	7.00pm	LW
Dutch League	Ajax	NAC Breda	7.15pm	LW
Italian League	SPAL	Fiorentina	7.30pm	LW
English Cup	Bristol City	Wolverhampton	9.00pm	LW
Dutch League	Groningen	Feyenoord	9.30pm	LW
Italian League	Genoa	Lazio	10.00pm	LW
German League	E Frankfurt	Monchengladbach	10.30pm	LW
Spanish League	Valencia	Espanyol	11.15pm	LW
Mon, 18 Feb 2019				
English Cup	Doncaster	Crystal Palace	12.00am	LW
German League	Leverkusen	Dusseldorf	1.00am	LW
Italian League	Inter	Sampdoria	1.00am	LW
Spanish League	Villarreal	Sevilla	1.30am	LW
Italian League	Napoli	Torino	3.30am	LW
French League	St Etienne	Paris SG	4.00am	LW

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LOTTERY

TOTO

Mon, 18 Feb 2019, 6.30pm Draw No. 3450/2019

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SportsWorld

Fergie back in hot seat for treble anniversary

LONDON • Former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson will return to the dugout for a charity match to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the team's treble-winning season, the Premier League football club announced yesterday.

The 77-year-old Scot will take charge of a legends side against Bayern Munich at Old Trafford on May 26.

Ferguson, who won the Champions League twice, the Premier League 13 times and five FA Cups with United, had emergency surgery for a brain haemorrhage in May last year but has since recovered.

REUTERS

Watford make last eight of FA Cup

LONDON • Watford became the first side into the FA Cup quarter-finals as the Premier League football club won 1-0 at second-tier Queens Park Rangers on Friday.

Etienne Capoue scored the only goal in first-half injury time to send Javi Gracia's side into the last eight. Luke Freeman and Matt Smith missed good chances to equalise and Watford held on to reach the last eight for the second time in four years.

DPA

Scott, Thomas lead weather-hit event

LOS ANGELES • Australian Adam Scott and American Justin Thomas topped the leaderboard at 10-under on Friday, when darkness halted play in the second round of the Genesis Open.

Both golfers posted five-under 66s, and each was five-under for the second round when darkness fell on another rainy day at Riviera Country Club. Tiger Woods struggled with the putter in a one-under first round and was still one-under, tied for 55th, after 12 holes of the second.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Kuchar says sorry, will pay caddie full figure

LOS ANGELES • Matt Kuchar apologised to caddie David Ortiz on Friday and said he will pay him the amount he asked for after the Mexican criticised the American golfer for giving him only US\$5,000 (\$56,780) of the nearly US\$1.3 million he earned by winning the Mayakoba Classic in November.

Earlier last week, Kuchar said Ortiz - who had stepped in as an emergency replacement - should be "happy" with the pay, despite regular caddies earning payouts of up to 10 per cent of a player's take from a tournament. Ortiz had reportedly sought US\$50,000.

REUTERS

FINALLY, STINGRAYS PUT OUT THE BLAZE

Stingrays rally late to end losing streak against champions in Netball Super League opener

Laura Chia

Three years ago, the Blaze Dolphins beat the Sneakers Stingrays 50-49 in the Netball Super League (NSL) final, scoring the winning point at the last second.

Yesterday, the Stingrays avenged that loss, as well as their winless streak against the Dolphins last season, when they beat the defending champions 46-45 in the opening NSL match this season, at Our Tampines Hub.

Both teams did not feature in the league in 2017, while Stingrays lost all three matches between the two sides last year.

Said Stingrays vice-captain Anna Soo: "We lost to Blaze previously (in 2016) by one and this time we came back with a win, so it's a good start to our season."

"We are very happy with how we

came back after the third quarter. The most important thing was teamwork. There was a lot of pushing forward from our attack and encouraging our teammates."

The Stingrays raced to a 7-2 lead in the first quarter, thanks to quick attacking and sharp shooting by Wong Pei Ying and Liu Xin Yi, before the Dolphins tightened their defence, with Under-21 player and NSL debutante Yew Shu Ning making key interceptions.

While the Stingrays entered half-time with a 22-19 lead, the Dolphins came out blazing in the third period, outscoring their opponents 15 to nine to take the lead at 34-31.

In the final period, the Dolphins had a 40-33 lead, only to see the Stingrays find their range and outscore their opponents 13 to five, including four goals in a row at the end, to emerge 46-45 victors.

Dolphins coach Wang Jing Qing said: "We gave away a lot on our centre pass and if we had capitalised on them in the later part of the fourth quarter, we could've ended with a different result."

"We need to take care of our own passes and timing instead of worrying about what the opponents will be doing."

She also praised 20-year-old Yew, who played goal defence and goalkeeper, but said she has room for improvement. "For her first game, she did well. But we need to reposition her angle so she can provide more pressure in the circle."

It is compulsory for NSL teams to field two U-21 players every game for at least two quarters this year and Yew played the whole match.

She said: "I was quite nervous, my hands were trembling before the match but after warming up, I felt ready and told myself to focus and go for every single ball."

"I thought I did not do badly but more can be done," she said, adding that she will work on improving her stamina.

In the other matches, Swifts Barcudas beat Magic Marlins 55-46 and Mission Mannas defeated new side Llabten Narwhals 67-54.

claura@sph.com.sg



Sneakers Stingrays goalkeeper Reena Divya Manogaran challenging Blaze Dolphins goal shooter Lee Pei Shan for the ball in the opening match of the Netball Super League 2019 at Our Tampines Hub yesterday. The Stingrays won 46-45. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

Next 48 Hours

TODAY

BASKETBALL
ABL Formosa Dreamers v Malaysia Dragons (3pm), Alab Pilipinas v Zhuhai Wolf Warriors (8pm) – StarHub Ch202.

FOOTBALL

English FA Cup 5th rd: Bristol City v Wolves (Singtel TV Ch112, 9pm), Doncaster v Palace (Ch111), Swansea v Brentford (Ch112) – 11.55pm.
Spanish LaLiga Real v Girona (6.55pm), Valencia v Espanyol (11.10pm), Villarreal v Sevilla (Monday, 1.25am) – StarHub Ch213.

GOLF

LPGA Tour Women's Australian Open Day 4 (Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209, 10am).
European Tour World Super 6 Perth Day 4 (StarHub Ch204, 11am).

TENNIS

ATP Rotterdam Open Day 7, final (StarHub Ch201, 10.30pm).

TOMORROW

TENNIS

ATP Rio Open Day 1 (StarHub Ch201, Tuesday 3.30am).

For latest updates, go to singtelv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.

Weekly tweetbits



HOT SHOT

"The last time I swam at the Melbourne Sports & Aquatic Centre was 13 years ago, when I competed at the 2006 Commonwealth Games. Time flies, guys." Swimmer Theresa Goh (right), with Yip Pin Xiu, Toh Wei Soong (The Straits Times Athlete of the Year nominee) and Sophie Soon, training ahead of the World Para Swimming World Series leg in Melbourne.



SWEET TWEET

"Thank you everybody for the well wishes!! Will continue to train hard and smart! And I heard it's everybody's birthday as well!! Happy birthday my friends." Muhammad Jaris Goh, bowler and The Straits Times Athlete of the Year nominee, returning birthday wishes to his friends on the seventh day of the Chinese New Year.



SAY WHAT?

"Happy Valentine's day." Paddler and The Straits Times Athlete of the Year nominee Yu Mengyu not revealing much while showing off a bouquet of roses on her Instagram on Feb 14.



THROWBACK

"He taught us how to play, how to never give up, how important it was to win your individual battles and what we needed to do to play for Manchester United Football Club. Eric we owe you everything." Ex-United defender Gary Neville, with David Beckham and brother Phil, pictured celebrating an FA Cup win in 1996 with former youth coach Eric Harrison, who died on Wednesday.

PHOTOS: INSTAGRAM/WHEELIE_WONKA, JARISGOH, YMENGYU, TWITTER/GNEV2

Fitness

HotBods

Text and pictures by Wang Hui Fen



Felix Tan, 19
Student

Height: 1.76m Weight: 75kg

Exercise regimen: I was probably born with the worst athletic genes the planet has to offer, but through studying and doing resistance exercises and plyometrics, I was able to improve my sporting performance, such as my vertical jump and speed.

Diet: Food hasn't been an issue for me since I work out pretty regularly. However, due to my current busy schedule I have made some changes to my nutrition. I reduced the amount of saturated and trans fat in my meals and increased unsaturated fats in order to reduce low-density lipoprotein.



Wenny Juwita, 22
Student

Height: 1.63m Weight: 57kg

Exercise regimen: I like sports, especially when it comes to challenging my own strength. The workouts that I usually do are HIIT, yoga, pilates and running. I also like water sports and hiking. Usually, I work out three to five times a week or more because I enjoy it.

Diet: I always drink a nutritional shake containing protein, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients important for my body for breakfast. Throughout the day, I like to balance my food intake and I focus more on macronutrients. Instead of cutting foods, I prefer food substitution. Plant-based foods are my favourite substitutes so far. My favourite go-to snacks are either boiled eggs or fruits.

SCAN AND WATCH
Hot bods videos and more:
instagram.com/straits_times



A night yoga event on Orchard Road in 2014 during Pedestrian Night. Yoga is a good option as it calms the mind and body and helps to reduce anxiety
PHOTO: LULULEMON ATHLETICA

THE NIGHT IS STILL YOUNG TO WORK OUT

It can be more convenient, and research says it improves heart health, lowers blood pressure

Zarelda Marie Goh

Not a morning person? You are in luck because exercising at night has its perks.

When it comes to choosing between sleep and a morning workout, we would not blame you if you picked the former over the latter most – if not all – of the time.

Few among us have the motivation to hit the gym before work and would rather sweat it out after office hours. That is all good because exercising at night has its benefits.

You might have come across research that suggests that physical exertion too close to bedtime will hinder your sleep because your levels of adrenaline and cortisol will be boosted.

Well, there is substantial research that suggests quite the opposite.

A 2013 study by the National Sleep Foundation in the US, for instance, found that there was no difference in sleep quality for people who worked out within four hours before bedtime. In fact, it really did not matter what time of the day par-

ticipants chose to exercise. Just exercising itself encouraged better sleep.

Night workouts can also improve your heart health. A study published in The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research found that those who exercised at night lowered their blood pressure by 15 per cent more than those who worked out in the morning.

And there are the practical benefits. You will not need to worry about packing your clothes, toiletries and make-up into your gym bag or rushing to the office.

Ready to sweat it out? Here are the best after-work workouts.

BOXING

This full-body workout gives you the chance to literally punch away all the stress and frustration built up throughout the work day.

You will stand to gain stamina and strength as well as better balance, agility and coordination from a boxing session.

For maximum calorie burn, we recommend going for an aqua boxing class, high-intensity interval

training style. In addition to doing rounds of jabs, hooks and uppercuts, you will also do body-weight exercises and weight training.

Expect to sweat buckets and feel like a million bucks afterwards.

YOGA

Calm your mind and body down at the same time by stretching it out in a yoga class. The stress-relieving benefits of this age-old practice have long been documented.

Yoga helps to regulate breathing, and increases bodily awareness; it interrupts our “worry cycle” and teaches us to practise self-compassion – all of these help in reducing anxiety.

Any style of yoga is beneficial, but Hatha yoga is a good one to start with if you are a newbie as the classes are usually conducted at a slower pace.

Go for a class that incorporates breathing exercises and meditation as these aid in relaxation.

RUNNING

This is a solo activity that allows you to listen to music or a podcast or simply zone out as you move.

Running at night is cooler and it is relatively inexpensive as you pretty much just need a good pair of trainers.

Research supports night running too. Scientists at the University of Chicago’s Clinical Research Centre conducted trial runs and found that the body’s metabolism adapted better to evening and night-time runs.

Post-run blood samples from participants also showed that levels of harmful by-products of stress, such as cortisol, were also lower at night compared to in the day.

WEIGHT TRAINING

The main perk of weight training: Your body will become more efficient at burning fat because you will gain more muscle.

It is worth incorporating this into your fitness routine as you will look more toned – no more flabby bits.

Women are also four times more likely than men to develop osteoporosis and weight training helps with preventing that by strengthening your bones.

Weight training in the evening is ideal because your body is in a better position to do it.

Lifting weights is a type of anaerobic exercise and according to research published in the Applied Physiology, Nutrition and Metabolism journal, anaerobic capacity is 7 per cent more in the evening compared with in the morning.

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SLICING THE PIE

Budget 2019 is set to give workers more help to learn new skills, support companies in staying competitive and include social policies like the Merdeka Generation Package. Insight gives a taste of what might come. **B4&5**

HAN FOOK KWANG

The worst thing that can happen is if Singaporeans and their leaders believe their own propaganda **B2**

LUNCH WITH SUMIKO

How good is S. Iswaran's Mandarin? He says: **'Lift upgrading – dianti fanxin. Don't play, play.'** **B3**



FABIAN KOH

Simple lessons from my kong kong **B6**

IT CHANGED MY LIFE

Once decadent nightclub promoter, now founder of global water charity **B7**



PHOTOS: WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, KEVIN LIM DESIGN: CHNG CHOON HIONG



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The Sunday Times says

Changes help Singaporeans thrive

Slowly but surely, changes are happening to Singapore's education system. Nanyang Technological University is broadening its admission criteria for 40 of its 111 undergraduate courses. Grades are no longer the sole qualifier for admissions; interviews, aptitude tests and portfolios will be taken into consideration as well. The National University of Singapore announced a special admission scheme for polytechnic students who show entrepreneurial abilities, and the Singapore Manage-

ment University is looking to help students tailor their education to suit their career interests.

Tertiary institutions are increasingly offering active industry partnerships and emphasising experiential learning beyond the classrooms. Such changes are crucial to preparing new generations to meet the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution. It is not just tertiary institutions that are implementing small but significant changes. The introduction of subject-based banding that al-

lows Normal stream students to take Express stream classes in subjects they are strong in and scrapping exams for Primary 1 and 2 pupils all signal a growing awareness of the need to tweak Singapore's education system to meet changing needs and expectations. It is heartening to see that steps are also being taken to address recent concerns about inequalities in education.

NTUC First Campus is working with the National Institute of Education on a three-year im-

pact study of children from low-income families. The education system has been undeniably successful in nurturing talent from Singapore's small population but has also come under fire for being too stressful and straight-laced. Past successes do not mean the system has to be preserved indefinitely. Hopefully, the recent changes are not just cosmetic. Singapore's education system needs to continue to offer everyone the same opportunities in the future if Singapore is to thrive.

ThinkingAloud

Looking up to leaders to tell the hard truth

People have come to expect them to rise above bureaucracy and talk openly about its problems



Han Fook Kwang

Editor-at-Large

I hope the discussion on whether the Government has become complacent will not end with Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat's recent defence of its record.

He was responding to an editorial in the Chinese-language newspaper Lianhe Zaobao which listed a distressing number of failures that had occurred in recent months which it said had eroded confidence in the public service.

The F list: The cyber hacking of 1.5 million medical records at SingHealth; the four NS training deaths over 17 months; the shocking unauthorised release of the identities of 14,200 HIV patients; SingPost's deteriorating level of mail service; and frequent MRT breakdowns in the past.

Zaobao asked if there was a deeper underlying cause to the incidents, and whether the people running these organisations might have become complacent.

It also criticised what it saw as a tendency to punish lower-level staff whenever an incident occurred while senior management appeared to escape accountability.

Zaobao's comments are reflective of the sentiments of a fair number who worry that these recent events were symptomatic of a general decline of standards here.

If not corrected, it would have grave consequences because Singapore had thrived on superior performance which made it an exceptional place in South-east Asia.

It was a serious charge, one that the Government had to respond to, and it was fitting that the rejoinder came from the prime minister-designate.

Mr Heng wrote: "The Zaobao editorial of Feb 1 raises serious questions that my colleagues and I will not shirk... We will not flinch from taking a hard look at ourselves each time there is a failure, and doing whatever is necessary to put things right."

"But I reject the suggestion by some that the political leadership has allowed the whole system to go slack. And worse still, that we have gone soft on ourselves and the public service, failing to hold senior people accountable when things go wrong."

He cited the Government's commitment to tackling problems such as in improving the MRT and in strengthening Singapore's cyber security.

And he argued that there have been tragic accidents in the past too such as the Hotel New World collapse, the Sentosa cable car accident and the Jurong Shipyard Spynos explosion, but each time the Government drew lessons and put things right.



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

It was a measured but forthright response.

End of the debate? I hope not.

This is an important discussion on Singapore's future, and we should keep it going if only to better understand what it takes to keep the country exceptional.

There are several issues that are worth addressing. First, to be fair to the Government, it is too sweeping to link some of these recent incidents to a general slacking in the public service.

A fairer assessment should take into account its achievements as

well: quality public housing now more readily available to young couples; competent healthcare (though cost is an issue); a very credible armed forces (despite those training deaths); and many other areas where the service has made a real difference to the quality of life.

I also doubt that, in their daily experience with the public service, Singaporeans have found its quality consistently wanting and worse than in the past.

So, why the perception that standards have slipped?

I believe it is because

Singaporeans are generally more sceptical of the Government's claim about its competence and commitment than in the past.

You can say you are as good as before, and perhaps you really are.

But the people will believe you only if there is trust and a close bond that exist between leaders and the people.

The founding generation of leaders earned it through tackling the many challenges facing a young country and delivered on their promises, making Singapore secure, providing jobs and solving basic problems in housing,

education and healthcare.

When there is trust, people will cut some slack over the occasional incident.

But if it is lacking, every mistake will look like further confirmation that their leaders are not up to it.

An important part of this trust-building is how open the Government is about discussing issues and problems that confront the country.

The People's Action Party (PAP) Government has always said it will not shirk from doing so, and I believe the current leaders embrace this approach.

But I think there has been a sea change in the way both leaders and people talk about the country and its challenges.

The pioneer generation of leaders, in particular founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, were highly critical of how things were done here and did not mince their words.

He was famous for telling it as it was, scolding Singaporean managers for their lack of imagination, lamenting the low productivity of workers, highlighting shortcomings in the civil service, and the many areas that needed shaping up.

Of course, he was that type of a leader and his straight-talking style might be ill-suited today.

But the result was that the people came to expect leaders to be able to rise above the bureaucracy, to talk openly about its problems and not appear defensive.

Over the years, however, as Singapore developed, the county has swung to the other extreme.

Now, Singaporeans are constantly reminded how the country is the world's best in this and that area and how well it is doing compared with others.

This is fine if it truly is so and there is nothing left to improve. But, of course it isn't. And the worse thing that can happen is if Singaporeans and their leaders believe their own propaganda.

I prefer the old days when leaders grumbled and the people had to take it on the chin than what is happening today when people grumble because leaders are not doing enough grumbling.

In fact, you do not need to go too far back into the early years to hear how Mr Lee responded to an incident.

This was what he said in 2008 about the shocking escape from prison of the accused terrorist Mas Selamat: "I think it's a very severe lesson of complacency that we are confident we have this man (Mas Selamat) sized up. It shows that it is a fallacy, it is stupid, to believe we are infallible."

Re-reading his quote, you wished someone would say it like he did about some of the recent incidents.

I hope Singaporeans and their leaders will stop telling themselves how ahead they are of others and talk more often about how behind they are in many areas.

Finally, this discussion on whether the Government has become complacent is also about Singapore's leadership transition to the fourth generation.

Behind the concern is whether the 4G leaders have what it takes to be as competent and farsighted as their predecessors.

There appears to be greater uncertainty over this compared with the last two handovers.

The 4G leaders will need to earn the respect and trust of Singaporeans that they are up to the task – not easy because of the high standards set by the previous generation of leaders.

It calls for exceptional leadership.

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• The writer is also senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.

LunchWithSumiko

Making Singapore matter to the world

Much of S. Iswaran’s career – in the Administrative Service, corporate world and politics – has seen him doing just that



Sumiko Tan

Executive Editor

It is a beautiful day in Davos, Switzerland. The air is a bracing minus 5 deg C, the mountains are dipped in snow and everywhere you look, the scenery is picture perfect.

Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran is kind of missing Singapore though, or at least, the food and, specifically, the food in West Coast, his constituency.

“It’s a nice view with a lot of snow and so on,” he says, pointing to the tall glass windows of the Cantinetta restaurant at the Ameron Swiss Mountain Resort. “But actually, it would have been more fun to do this in my hawkker centres. We have some very good food places there.”

West Coast Market Square in Clementi West Street 2 has great stalls, he says, as does Ayer Rajah Food Centre in West Coast Drive.

“Everybody, of course, thinks they have the best food places, but I really believe we do.”

Today, though, we settle for the restaurant’s Western fare.

We peruse the menu.

“This will be exorbitant,” he says of the Swiss prices. “Completely different league.”

He asks if I am hungry and I say yes, I haven’t had breakfast.

“Go for it,” he says.

I get a beef burger (55 Swiss francs) and he opts for a penne with chicken (39 Swiss francs). We get a salad (39 Swiss francs) to share.

We’re meeting in January at the annual World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, where world leaders and CEOs meet to make deals, exchange ideas and network.

The Ameron hotel is not far from the Congress Centre where most sessions are held. It’s bustling with participants identifiable by their white badges. At a table next to ours, top honchos from Singapore-based ride-hailing company Grab are in discussion.

Mr Iswaran, 56, who is also Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations as well as Cybersecurity, is already at the restaurant when I arrive. His day had started early and over the three days in Davos, he packs in almost 30 meetings.

It is his third time at the WEF. His first, in 2013, was eventful.

He had made the 2½-hour drive from Zurich airport to Davos, 1,500m up in the mountains, and checked into the hotel. As he came out of the shower, he got a call from his wife telling him that his mother had fallen very ill and was in the intensive care unit.

“I put everything back in the suitcase, got into a car, went down again to Zurich and took the night flight out, so that was quite a thing.”

His mother survived that health scare but passed away in 2017.

Gatherings like the WEF allow Singapore to be seen and heard on the world stage and to offer “thought leadership”, as he puts it.

At this year’s Davos, he shared how Singapore has come up with a framework to help businesses tackle the ethical challenges related to the rising use of artificial intelligence.

It is a concern that has gained momentum globally and Singapore’s proposal will contribute to the conversation.

Then, together with Australia and Japan, Singapore initiated a meeting of World Trade Organisation members to restart negotiations on a set of global rules governing e-commerce.

“Many people look at Singapore as a place that has the capacity to offer innovative ideas and solutions on issues of the day,” he says with some satisfaction.

His portfolio covers trade, media and technology – hot issues in a world rocked by trade wars, fake news and IT disruptions.

His job is to help Singapore and Singaporeans find their place in this frightening new world.

He sees the digital economy as a great way of democratising economic opportunities.

Unlike before, Singapore’s SMEs can plug into digital platforms and gain access to global markets and cost-effective services.

“It’s a very empowering, inclusive trend,” he says.

There are, of course, downsides such as jobs that disappear, which is where the Government comes in to help Singaporeans remain relevant through reskilling.

“If we can get the digital initiatives right, and if we can also get rules and norms established for regional and global trade, it basically means we are opening up whole new areas of opportunity for Singaporeans,” he says.

A good example is the European Union-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA), which Singapore officials have been working to make happen over the past nine years. Last week, the European Parliament voted in support of the agreement.

The EUSFTA will see Singapore remove tariffs on all EU products entering the Republic, and the EU removing tariffs on 84 per cent of all Singapore products entering the EU within the first year. The remaining 16 per cent will follow over a period of three to five years.

It is happy news for businesses here, especially SMEs.

“That’s really been the driving motivation for a lot of the work we are doing,” he says.

HE’S often dressed in a suit, leading to an impression he might be formal and serious, stuffy even.

But up close, Mr Iswaran has an easy and approachable manner and comes across as someone who keeps things on an even keel.

I tell him that I once spotted him and his wife dancing to the music at a pop concert some years ago.

“We enjoy music, my wife and I,” he laughs, and adds: “Maroon 5 is coming, you know?”

He met his Australian wife at university in Australia. A Colombo Plan scholar, he got a first-class honours degree in economics from the University of Adelaide.

He and his wife, a former teacher, have three children – a 21-year-old daughter in university and two sons, aged 19 and 15. The elder boy has Down syndrome.

After university, Mr Iswaran went into the Administrative Service and worked in the ministries of Home Affairs and Education.

He was seconded to the National Trades Union Congress and later to self-help group Sinda, the Singapore Indian Development Association, as its first CEO.

He returned to the civil service as director for international trade at the Ministry of Trade and Industry.



Making deals for Singapore is all in a day’s work for Communications and Information Minister S. Iswaran. At the recent World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, he launched Singapore’s proposed framework on the ethics guiding the rising use of artificial intelligence.



Mr Iswaran, who is also an MP for West Coast GRC, at a grassroots event last year. He takes pride in the constituency and has picked up conversational Mandarin to connect better with grassroots leaders and residents. PHOTO: COURTESY OF S. ISWARAN

In 1997, when he was 34, he entered politics as a Member of Parliament for West Coast GRC.

He joined Singapore Technologies and later Temasek Holdings and was involved in investments in areas like pharmaceuticals, biotech and high-tech manufacturing.

He was appointed to the Cabinet in 2006. Among other things, he was involved in bringing in the Formula 1 Singapore Grand Prix night race, an event that has done much to add lustre to the Singapore brand.

Politics wasn’t something he had set his sights on earlier, he says.

But he always knew he wanted to contribute to society in a meaningful way as that was drummed into him at home.

He grew up in a terraced house in the Thomson area, the elder of two children. His sister is a civil servant. His paternal grandparents and an uncle’s family lived nearby and they were a close-knit family.

His late father was a civil engineer who was born in Malaya, went to India to do his university studies and got married there.

His father, who had interests like singing and acting, had to travel often for work, and Mr Iswaran

seems to have had a close relationship with his mother, a woman of firm opinions.

She lived with his family in her later years and he remembers how, when work took up a lot of his time, he would look forward to having breakfast with her when he wasn’t travelling.

“My mum, she would have very strong views on things like euthanasia, and I’m like, ‘Mum, enjoy your breakfast. Why don’t we chill a bit?’”

His paternal grandparents were active in the community and his mother often talked about the importance of keeping people in mind and helping others.

As a child, he and his parents would visit his maternal grandparents in India, who lived at the border of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

His grandfather had a house in a rural area and one family story revolves around how he refused to drink the milk from the cows there.

“My grandfather apparently asked me, ‘So what do you drink in Singapore?’ I said, ‘I drink milk there.’ He said, ‘Where do you think that milk comes from?’ So I said, ‘It comes from the supermarket in a

bottle.’ I’ve never lived that down.”

He went to St Andrews and National Junior College and played hockey. He spoke Tamil and English at home and did Malay in school.

Although he came from a traditional Indian family, there were no issues when he married a Caucasian woman.

“My mum was very open about it and even my grandmother was actively involved in planning the wedding. I was very impressed by their openness and grateful for that.”

I ask if his special needs son has changed him in any way.

“I think the opinion may be divided on this,” he laughs.

He says he has become more patient. “I used to want to get things done fast. I think my son has taught me to accept that certain things cannot be rushed and we need forbearance.”

But, he adds, every child is a different experience with his own rewards and challenges.

WHILE his day job involves dealing with geopolitical issues like trade, his political work takes him to the grassroots.

He sounds like he enjoys constituency work and is proud and



WHAT WE ATE

Ristorante Cantinetta
Ameron Swiss Mountain Resort
Scalettastrasse
22, 7270 Davos, Switzerland

1 beef burger: 55 Swiss francs

1 penne: 39 Swiss francs

1 Caesar salad: 39 Swiss francs

1 San Pellegrino: 13 Swiss francs

TOTAL: 146 Swiss francs (S\$197)

WHAT WE COULD HAVE EATEN

West Coast Market Square
Block 726,
Clementi West Street 2

- Ming Kee Porridge
- He Ji Duck Rice, Porridge, Noodles
- Yon Yan Fried Chicken Wings and Bee Hoon

Ayer Rajah Food Centre
503, West Coast Drive

- Habib’s Indian Rojak
- NM Abdul Rahim Mee Goreng

protective of his West Coast ward.

When I remark that the West Coast area is not very well known, he pounces on what I mean by that.

I suppose the area is a bit *ulu* (remote), I suggest.

“No lah, how can you say it’s *ulu*,” he protests.

“You mean in terms of awareness?” he presses. I nod.

“If by *ulu* you mean it’s a well-kept secret, I’m sure my residents will be happy for it to be that way,” he says.

He adds with pride that the area has developed a lot. About 15 condominium developments have sprung up in the last decade or so, and there are many interesting lifestyle options like West Coast Park and interesting food choices, and Clementi town is nearby.

He relates how community leaders worked to save the trees in West Coast Road when it was widened. There was also a tree-planting drive and there are now about 700 trees along the stretch with many interesting varieties.

“It’s a nice area. There’s a lot of community spirit.”

For his part, he has picked up conversational Mandarin to connect better with grassroots leaders and residents.

“I can’t read Mandarin but I know some hanyu pinyin. When you want to get people to engage and feel connected, you’ve got to find different mechanisms. Part of it is how to use the language.”

How proficient is he? “*Cha bu duo*” (so-so) is the answer.

“Lift-upgrading, *Diant’ fanxin*,” he suddenly says. “Don’t play, play.”

His GRC might well be one to watch in the next general election.

Last month, former People’s Action Party MP Tan Cheng Bock applied to set up a new political party. A natural assumption is he will contest his old ward, Ayer Rajah, which falls in Mr Iswaran’s GRC.

Does he think Dr Tan will contest there?

“I’ve no idea,” he says. “Which is why I think it’s best that we focus on the things that are within our control. Focus on getting the job done right, do our best for the residents and see how it goes.”

He adds: “At the end of the day, it’s a process and at the appropriate time, we’ll all have to make our case to the people and then let them choose, based on what they think is right for them.”

His press secretary drops by the table to remind him that he needs to leave for his next appointment, and we wrap up the meal.

His penne doesn’t look too appetising and he hasn’t eaten much of it. My burger has been ordinary, not worth the price tag.

As I head back into the Davos cold and snow, I keep thinking about hawkker food because he had mentioned it.

Back in Singapore, I follow up with an e-mail to ask him what he would have recommended if we had eaten in his West Coast ward. I share his favourite stalls on this page.

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Budget 2019

Experts predict fiscal fillip

They expect an expansionary Budget, with projected surplus in government coffers for FY2018



Linette Lai

Political Correspondent

Tomorrow, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat will arrive at Parliament House to deliver his fourth Budget speech, setting the tone for Singapore's spending in the coming year.

The details are, of course, top secret. But Mr Heng has dropped plenty of hints over the past few weeks about what Singaporeans can expect.

In his words, the Budget will have a "comprehensive agenda", focusing on topics such as security, economic transformation and the details of the multibillion-dollar

Merdeka Generation Package.

Analysts with an eye on Singapore's economic performance predict that Budget 2019 will be an expansionary one, with a projected surplus in government coffers for the 2018 financial year.

Some have also raised the possibility that this could be a pre-election Budget, adding that if so, there is "ample fiscal latitude to be more generous and further boost expenditure".

The next general election must be held by April 2021. Some people say it could be called this year.

DBS Bank senior economist Irvin Seah says the fiscal balance for the 2018 financial year is expected to register a surplus of \$3.3 billion, compared with the previously expected deficit of \$600 million.

He adds that the Government is likely to have accumulated significant surpluses, allowing Budget 2019 to be expansionary "without diluting fiscal prudence". "Without the accumulated surpluses, policymakers could afford to be slightly more aggressive," Mr Seah says.

Mr Liang Eng Hwa, who chairs the Government Parliamentary Committee for Finance and Trade and Industry, also points out that accumulated surpluses not spent in

this term will be locked up as past reserves in the new term of government. "We are entering into the fourth year of this term of government," he notes. "Given this constitutional requirement, the Government will naturally tend to be more conservative in budgeting at the start of the term and would look to spend and redistribute more in the later half of the term using the accumulated surpluses."

Given the threats of global competition and digital disruption, one of the highlights of this year's Budget could be an expansion of the SkillsFuture scheme, says Ms Selena Ling, who heads treasury research

and strategy at OCBC Bank.

She adds that a sugar tax may be on the cards, given the Government's ongoing war against diabetes. Last year, the Health Ministry launched a public consultation to seek feedback on several proposals to cut people's sugar intake, including taxing or banning high-sugar drinks.

This sentiment is echoed by United Overseas Bank economist Barnabas Gan. But he adds that if such a tax is implemented, it is more likely to change behaviour rather than boost revenues.

He says that Singaporeans might also see a hike in the tax on alcohol

— last raised in 2014 — and more details on the "Netflix tax", which was announced during last year's Budget speech.

If it is indeed a pre-election Budget, Singaporeans may also see handouts such as the Grow and Share package in both 2006 and 2011, or the personal income tax rebates in 2011 and 2015, Ms Ling says.

And whether or not elections are a factor, the uncertain global economic backdrop means that Singapore has to stay business-relevant, Mr Gan says — suggesting that the Budget will be an expansionary one.

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BUDGET 2019

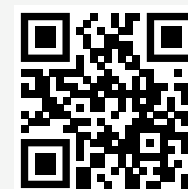
Follow The Straits Times for updates online, on radio and in print

Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat will deliver the Budget statement tomorrow at 3.30pm

- Live streaming and real-time updates at www.straitstimes.com
- Sign up for Budget e-mail newsletter now at str.sg/newsletters
- Facebook Live forum with ST columnists Chua Mui Hoong, Ravi Velloor and Salma Khalik right after the speech. Moderated by Hairianto Diman



- Live broadcast of post-Budget discussion on **Money FM 89.3** at 7pm
- Analyses of what the Budget means to you
- Post-Budget roundtable with industry experts led by ST associate editor **Vikram Khanna**



For more, visit the Budget microsite at str.sg/budget2019



Calls for SkillsFuture top-up, help for local firms

Helping workers keep pace with Singapore's economic transformation is one of the many pressing items on the government agenda, says Mr Liang Eng Hwa, who chairs the Government Parliamentary Committee for Finance and Trade and Industry.

"We need stronger and more decisive measures to help Singaporeans to stay employed and be re-employed," Mr Liang says. "Middle-aged workers still face steep challenges to find suitable jobs when they are disrupted or displaced."

This could mean more help in the Budget for people to pick up skills needed in the new digital economy,

possibly through the expansion of the SkillsFuture scheme.

Ms Selena Ling, who heads treasury research and strategy at OCBC Bank, suggests that the Government might top up the initial \$500 SkillsFuture credit.

A SkillsFuture enhancement could also take the form of identifying and introducing courses that are relevant to Singapore's digital transformation, says United Overseas Bank economist Barnabas Gan.

He adds: "We perceive that such cutting-edge courses may not come cheap, so a dollars-and-cents enhancement to the overall SkillsFuture credit account will

likely be welcomed, too."

Associate Professor Simon Poh, from the National University of Singapore's Business School, calls for the cap on course-fee tax reliefs to be raised from \$5,500 to \$8,000 when people attend courses relevant to their trade.

In fact, the Government could consider changing how these tax reliefs are granted, Prof Poh says.

He suggests that instead of requiring people to claim reliefs in the year that they pay for courses, they could be allowed to credit these to a separate account which can be tapped at any point.

"This will address a situation

where a retrenched worker or a new job entrant needs to upgrade by attending relevant courses to enhance their employability, but may not benefit from the tax breaks in a year when they derive little or no taxable income," Prof Poh says.

On the wish list for many experts are also measures to keep local enterprises going strong, especially given the uncertain global economic environment.

In a set of recommendations sent to the Finance Ministry last December, professional services firm PwC also encouraged the Government to look into measures to strengthen local firms and grow Singapore's position as a hub for start-ups.

"We called for targeted reliefs and funding that would help businesses alleviate the investment cost of going digital, and encourage them to digitise their data and modernise their processes," says Mr Chris Woo, who is tax leader at PwC Singapore.

Staff preparing meals at the Sats Inflight Catering Centre. Sats, a local gateway services and food solutions provider, has participated in several SkillsFuture initiatives. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

Merdeka details to be unveiled

Details of the much talked-about Merdeka Generation Package, which will help cushion the impact of rising healthcare costs for nearly half a million Singaporeans, will be one of the key announcements made by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat tomorrow.

The multibillion-dollar package for Singaporeans born in the tumultuous 1950s, dubbed the Merdeka Generation ("merdeka" means "freedom" in Malay) was announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during last year's National Day Rally.

Like the \$8 billion Pioneer Generation Package before it, the Merdeka Generation Package would help offset medical expenses through outpatient subsidies, Medisave top-ups, MediShield Life premium subsidies and payouts for long-term care.

It would not be as generous as the Pioneer Generation Package — for those born in or before 1949 — but OCBC Bank's head of treasury research and strategy Selena Ling estimates the Merdeka Generation Package could still cost between \$4 billion and \$7 billion.

She added that it was likely Budget 2019 would fund the package in one go, given Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing's earlier assurance the funds would be set aside by this government.

DBS Bank senior economist Irvin Seah expects Budget 2019 to focus on managing rising healthcare costs, which would continue to be a concern, given Singapore's ageing population.

He notes that healthcare spending has increased at a much faster pace than overall government spending — from about \$2 billion in 2007 to \$8 billion last year, and says: "Upward pressure on health spending, as well as other forms of social spending, will only continue to escalate unless measures are put in place to manage that."

On the Budget wish list of Mr Panneer Selvam, people advisory services partner at Ernst & Young Solutions, is that the Government would allow a tax deduction for health insurance premiums that is not tied to Central Provident Fund contributions.

"Enabling a tax deduction will encourage more taxpayers to take up health insurance policies, and also offer them greater access to healthcare," he said.

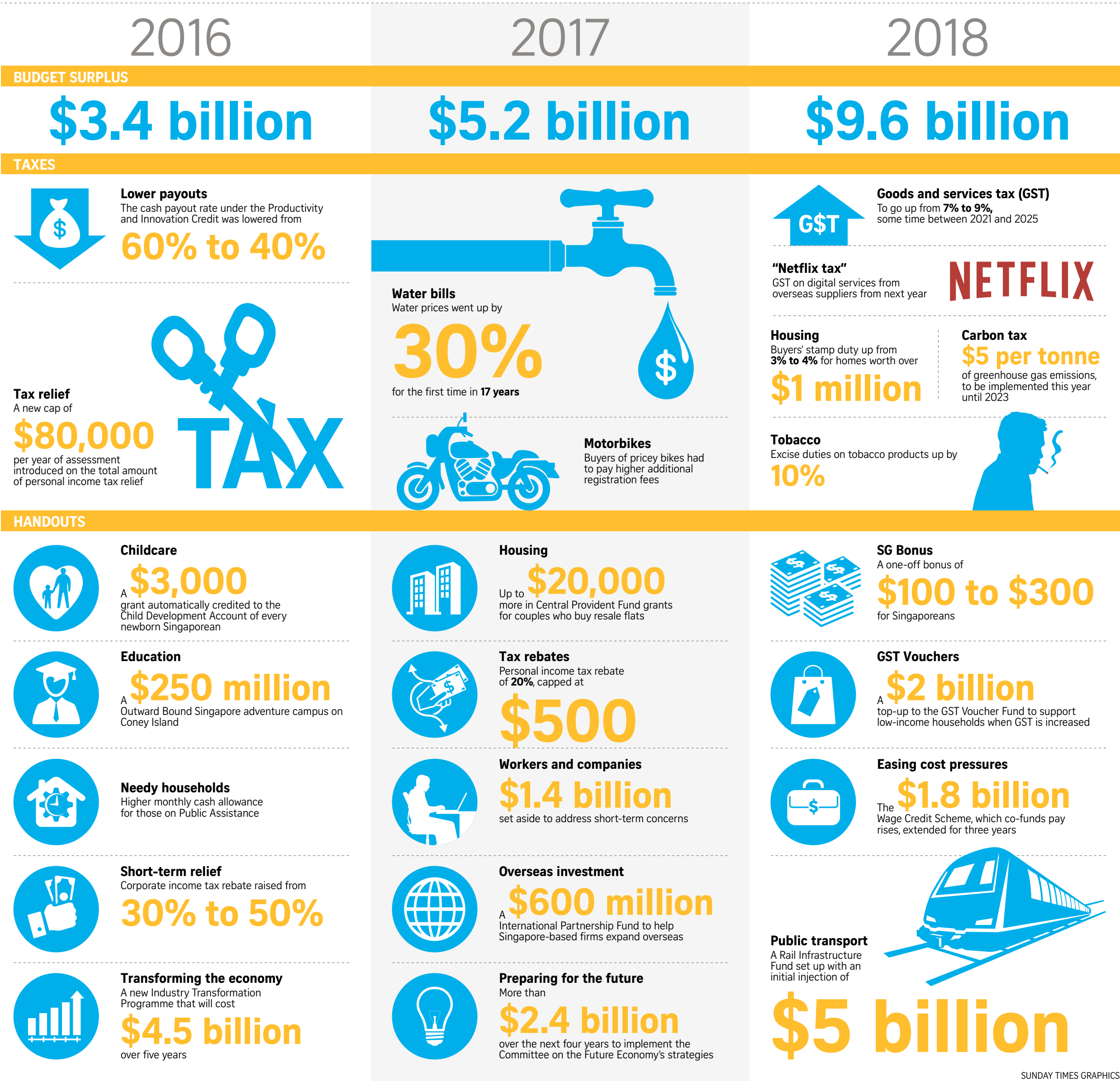
Linette Lai

Like the \$8 billion Pioneer Generation Package before it, the Merdeka Generation Package would help offset medical expenses through outpatient subsidies, Medisave top-ups, MediShield Life premium subsidies and payouts for long-term care.

Budget 2019

Budgets through the years

The Sunday Times takes a look at key announcements made during the past three Budget speeches



SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

3 questions on Budget 2019

These issues will be at the top of my mind as I watch Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat deliver his Budget speech tomorrow



Chua Mui Hoong

Opinion Editor

1: Will this be an election Budget?

The next general election does not have to be held till April 2021, but there is some expectation that early polls may be called this year. A new team is now in place to take over the running of the country. A year-long programme of events to mark the bicentennial, or 200th anniversary, of the arrival of British traders to Singapore, could generate some feel-good effects. The economy is performing reasonably well. If an election is planned this year, this Budget will include sweeteners. Already, the Merdeka Generation, or those born in the

1950s, have been promised a package of healthcare and other subsidies. The Government's coffers were flush last year, and it can likely afford more giveaways to more people, since it can spend existing Budget surpluses accumulated during this term of government. Cash grants for all Singaporeans, and more-generous-than-usual assistance for households, are two signs this might be an election Budget.

2: What does this Budget say about the priorities of the new 4G team?

This is the first Budget presented by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat as the designated successor to be prime minister, and as first among equals of the so-called fourth generation of leaders. It is Mr Heng's third Budget since his stroke in 2016, from which he made a remarkable recovery. Since 2011, spending on healthcare and social needs has gone up significantly. Will the 2019 Budget continue that trajectory? Or will it mark a slight shift from social spending to investment? As tech and economic disruption upends industries, this might be an opportune year for the Government to ramp up spending on talent development, skills training, tax breaks for companies and grants to raise productivity, spur innovation and entrepreneurship. A greater emphasis on this front will position Singapore to be more future-ready, and enable workers

and companies to be better prepared for the bracing changes to come.

3: Will the Government be able to wrest control of the political narrative from the incessant drip of criticism and put its own vision front and centre of Singaporeans' hearts and minds?

This speech comes amid several

As tech and economic disruption upends industries, this might be an opportune year for the Government to ramp up spending on talent development, skills training, tax breaks for companies and grants to raise productivity, spur innovation and entrepreneurship.

unfortunate events that have called into question the Government's vigilance and response: several young men dying during military training; high-profile data breaches of medical records and the ongoing incursion into Singapore's waters by Malaysian government vessels. These have put the Government, at least in the eyes of the people, somewhat on the defensive.

The Budget is one of two events in the political calendar each year that gives the Government a sustained, nationwide platform to spell out its agenda (the other is the National Day Rally in August). This is an opportunity for Mr Heng to deliver a Budget speech that takes back the political initiative from fault-finders, answers critics and inspires citizens. Such a speech will require more than tax giveaways or handouts, although these also matter. It requires a vision of the future and a road map on how to rally the nation together to get there. You can't present all that in a two-hour speech; a road map of the future, for example, will require a lot of collaborative consultation and dialogues with stakeholders and citizens. Mr Heng, architect of Our Singapore Conversation, has said he plans to hold nationwide dialogues on the country's future. Dialogues take time, as does policymaking. But the fire of enthusiasm can be lit tomorrow.

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What's Trending

Flap in China over 'toxic chicken soup for the soul'

Spotlight cast on 'self-media' after top blogger comes under fire for fabricating content



Ong Hwee Hwee

Digital Editor

Zhou Youze came from a poor village in Sichuan, but the bright young man did well enough to get into one of China's top universities. To put himself through school, he gave tuition and took on odd jobs. After graduation, he worked as an accountant and supported his sister, who was still schooling. But he struggled with the pressures of living in a big city. His life was abruptly cut short when he was diagnosed with cancer. He died when he was just 24. All he left behind were 3,700 yuan (\$5740) in his bank account, and an old 100 yuan jacket he was wearing. The sad story of the young man went viral after it was posted on China's popular messenger app, WeChat, on Jan 29. Titled "The death of a top scorer from a poor family", the article touched on hot-button issues, such as the social divide, which resonated with Chinese online users.

But the outpouring of sympathy quickly turned into outrage – when it turned out that the story was fabricated. Some sharp-eyed online users had noticed that details in the story did not quite add up. The article was later traced to a WeChat account registered under the same legal entity as Mimeng, an influential blogger known as China's "queen of self-media". The fake news controversy has cast the spotlight on China's *zimeiti* – or "self-media" – which broadly refers to popular bloggers and influencers. Some also call the phenomenon "Wemedia", in reference to the popular Chinese online platforms, WeChat and Weibo. Three days after the story was published, Mimeng apologised. "The Mimeng Group has decided to permanently shut down our Weibo account and take a two-month break from WeChat. During this time, we will reflect deeply on our work," said the apology on Weibo that has since been viewed 210 million times. Mimeng, whose real name is Ma Ling, is one of China's top bloggers with more than 14 million subscribers on her WeChat account and over 2.6 million Weibo followers. According to media reports, she charges advertisers as much as 750,000 yuan for a post. But the 42-year-old, who is from Sichuan province, is no stranger to controversy. Writing mainly on relationship problems, she has been criticised for her controversial views and clickbait articles with headlines such as "Jealousy means progress" and "This is why you're poor". Her apology did little to placate critics, some of whom have called for a complete shutdown of her WeChat account.



Blogger Mimeng, whose real name is Ma Ling, is known as China's "queen of self-media". She was criticised recently for a fake article posted on an account linked to her firm. PHOTO: WECHAT/MIMENG

People's Daily accused Mimeng of paying lip service with her apology. While there is nothing wrong with bloggers making money from their content, "self-media cannot become a spiritual pyramid scheme" by feeding readers with "toxic chicken soup for the soul", it added. Some, however, said "self-media" is not solely to blame. "Shouldn't we also ask ourselves why some online users are so easily taken in?" said a Weibo user.

The episode came just months after China's censors deleted nearly 10,000 social media accounts, including those of online influencers commenting on social issues. The authorities accused some of the accounts of profiting from spreading false information and damaging "the ecology of online public opinion", among other things. According to a report by Chinese consultancy Topklout, there were about 30 million "self-media"

content providers in China in 2017 and the industry was worth more than 5 billion yuan. Some experts noted that there were also concerns among the Chinese leadership on rising dissent among younger online users. Some users, however, have argued for a light touch. One user said: "Everyone should be allowed to decide what they choose to read, and learn to judge for themselves whether the information is credible. You can shut down Mimeng, but there are many more."

urged Instagram to also clamp down on images promoting potentially life-threatening eating disorders. "People will not develop an eating disorder by being exposed to images that glamorise eating disorders, but research shows that such content helps perpetuate the illnesses for people who are already suffering," Mr Tom Quinn from Beat, an eating disorder charity in Britain, told The Guardian. Others have pointed out that other platforms also host such content. American YouTube star Eugenia Cooney, for example, had come under fire for flaunting her very thin body in her fashion and make-up tutorial videos. The 24-year-old, who has 1.5 million subscribers on her channel, had insisted she was "naturally thin". But a recent video of her skeletal-looking body in a sleeveless cosplay costume raised concerns about her health, even among her fans. Last week, she announced that she would be taking a break from social media to focus on her health. She tweeted: "Hi guys! I appreciate the concern. I'm taking a break from social media and voluntarily working on this with my doctor privately. Please respect that."

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American YouTube star Eugenia Cooney has come under fire for flaunting her very thin body in her videos. Last week, she announced that she would be taking a break from social media to focus on her health. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/EUGENIACOONEY

NOTABLE TRENDS

CARLTON HOTEL: Some areas in central Singapore had their electricity supply disrupted briefly on Thursday afternoon due to equipment failure at the substation serving Carlton Hotel in Bras Basah Road. It also caused a fire at the hotel, forcing the evacuation of 1,000 people.

CAPTAIN MARVEL: Anticipation has been building ahead of the March premiere of Marvel's first female-led film starring Brie Larson. The cast was in town last week for the first and only Asian stop of the movie's global publicity tour.

GORDON BANKS: The goalkeeper in England's 1966 World Cup-winning team died on Tuesday at the age of 81. He was best remembered for the "save of the century" – the diving stop he made to deny Brazil's Pele at the 1970 World Cup.

ONLY ONLINE
The week's top 3 picks at straitstimes.com

VIDEO: Singaporean of the Year
Interfaith Youth Circle co-founder Siti Noor Mastura has been named The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year for 2018. str.sg/mastura

VIDEO: 200 years in 200 secs
In a special video that brings historical media to life, we zip through 200 years of Singapore history in 200 seconds. str.sg/200yrs

VIDEO: Hangout with ST
Topics include the Chinese student who faces deportation for throwing pudding at a police officer, and Valentine's Day. str.sg/hangout51

#OpinionOfTheDay

Staycations with my 'kong kong' and the lessons he taught me



Fabian Koh

It's been exactly a month since my grandfather died. The man whom I called "kong kong", which is Teochew for paternal grandfather, passed away in the wee hours of Jan 17. James Koh was 88 years old when stomach cancer took him, and I still think about him every single day. He was a big influence on me as I was growing up, and is in fact one reason I am writing this column as a journalist today. You see, back in primary school, my older brother and I used to stay over at my grandparents' old house in Khatib during the June holidays. Most mornings, kong kong would buy breakfast – typically roti prata – and the day's newspaper, which I would read in part because the

mischief maker in me wanted to annoy him by copying his actions. Until today, I'm still not sure what caught my attention but young as I was then, I took an interest in newspapers and the stories in them. Years later, I took up a journalism scholarship for my university studies and then joined The Straits Times. After I started work some three years ago, kong kong would always tell me during my visits that he was glad I was working hard. His pride in me extended beyond those words, as I was to discover after he died. A few days after the funeral, we were clearing out his stuff. These included the notebooks in which he wrote about his travels to places such as Rome and London, six pairs of spectacles and six watches that he kept on his study table – lined up in neat rows like a National Day Parade contingent – and a red folder. The folder contained news articles bearing my byline. Seeing those newspaper clippings among his belongings, I was really touched and overcome with emotion, especially as the discovery came just as I was going through a demoralising slump at work. Since his death, I have been thinking about how my grandfather always emphasised the importance of genuine human connection. When the era of mobile phones kicked in, he refused to get one. My dad said kong kong never liked the idea of owning one. In fact, kong kong would often lament: "Nowadays, everyone is

always glued to their phones." Even in the pre-mobile phone days, he preferred that my brother and I spend time outdoors and in the sun, instead of sitting around indoors playing Game Boys. (For those too young to know, Game Boys are the devices we originally played Pokemon on.) It was kong kong who taught me how to ride a bicycle during one of our June holiday "staycations" with him and my grandmother. My brother, who is older, had learnt the skill previously and it was my turn to step up to the pedal. Kong kong took me to the basketball court at the school near where they lived. My brother came along for moral support. In hindsight, he might have been there just for the laughs. I started on a bicycle with training wheels, and before long I did not need them. I was on my way! But kong kong did not teach me how to apply the brake and bring the bicycle to a stop. So the following weekend, when I showed off my new skill to my dad, I ended up crashing into a shrub. Kong kong told me stories about growing up in a kampung, and days spent going to Pulau Tekong, Ubin and other nearby islands with his friends in a motorised sampan. Those were simpler days, when people's lives were not ruled by electronic devices, and Pulau Tekong was not yet off-limits other than for military training. Kong kong was also quite the handyman. He would saw up wood from old furniture such as desks and shelves and turn them into new



The writer with his grandfather in 2017. The elderly man emphasised the importance of genuine human connection. ST PHOTO: FABIAN KOH

items such as stools. I have one of the last stools he made, which he gave me and which I still use. He also had a habit of rearranging the furniture in his home, back when he still had the energy to. One weekend, you would be sitting on a sofa by the window, and the next it was in the middle of the flat under the ceiling fan. It was like a life-size game of The Sims. And you know how the Internet loves dad jokes? These are typically based on puns and are funny precisely because they are so lame and cringe-worthy. Well, the ones online have nothing on my granddad's jokes. Sitting at the head of the table

during family dinners at his flat in Punggol, kong kong would always crack jokes, one of which went like this: How does a fish laugh? Hur hur hur. How does a prawn laugh? Heh heh heh. How does a crab laugh? Hia hia hia. (In Teochew, hur means fish, heh means prawn, and hia means crab.) After that, he would laugh and be so proud, so even though the joke itself was really quite bad, I loved every second of him telling it. Kong kong was also a very spontaneous person. I remember

one morning, when we were hanging out, he asked out of the blue if I wanted to eat fish porridge. I was in primary school then and bored during the holidays, so I said "yes". We immediately left the house and, with no North East MRT line back then, took a bus from Khatib to Tekka Market to eat fish porridge. Now, whenever I think of or go past Tekka Market, I associate it with fish porridge. Well done, kong kong. A piece of his wisdom that stays with me is this question he liked to pose: "What's the difference between a big and small wave? There's none, because when they hit the shore, they both become nothing." As such, he saw little point in the non-stop pursuit of material gain since the more important things in life were relationships, especially those with one's family. Kong kong really valued and loved his family, as evident from the pictures of his children and grandchildren displayed in his bedroom. For that and the many other lessons he taught me, I will always remember my kong kong. I still feel a deep sense of loss at his passing, but I'm glad that he lived a long and fulfilling life and that I got to spend a big chunk of my life with him.

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• #OpinionOfTheDay is a column for younger writers in the newsroom to write about issues that matter to them and their peers.



A one-year stint with Mercy Ships, a floating hospital, changed Mr Scott Harrison's "corrupted" perspective on life. He returned to New York to set up a global charity to bring clean water to the world and get people to care about an issue which affects one in 10 people worldwide.
ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

ItChangedMyLife

Redemption in quenching others' thirst

Nightclub promoter turns his back on a life of vice and debauchery, and sets up global water charity



Wong Kim Hoh

Senior Writer

One October night in 2004 in Liberia, Mr Scott Harrison chugged seven cans of beer and finished two packets of cigarettes.

There was a reason for the alcoholic and nicotine binge – it was his last dalliance with these habits. The next day, the then 29-year-old New Yorker would be walking up a gangway to board Mercy Ships, an old cruise ship converted into a floating hospital.

He was going to live on board for a year as a volunteer, documenting the non-profit work done by the ship's team of doctors and other medical professionals.

It was his attempt at redemption, his way of severing all ties with a decade spent as a nightclub promoter and a purveyor of vice, excess and debauchery.

He came home a changed man. The suffering he saw in that one year in a country “where there was no electricity, no running water, no sewage, no mail system and only one doctor for every 50,000 people” so unsettled him that he decided he had to do good.

He went for a second stint where he learnt that nearly 700 million people in the world lack access to clean water and that more than 50 per cent of all diseases in developing countries are caused by dirty water.

It led him to found charity: water. This is a global charity which, in the last 13 years, has raised more than US\$350 million (\$\$476 million) and funded nearly 30,000 water projects in 26 countries.

Mr Harrison is the prodigal son come home. “I realised that in the same way that I was promoting drunkenness and debauchery, I could promote redemptive, humanitarian work. It has been my mission since,” says the 43-year-old, who

was in town last week to give talks about his work.

Blessed with pop star looks and a great radio voice, the energetic and charismatic man was born in Philadelphia, the only child of a businessman and a journalist.

When he was four, the family moved to New Jersey. Unknown to them, their new four-bedroom home had a carbon monoxide gas leak.

“We all started dying,” he says ominously. “Dad, mum and I started getting sick.”

On New Year's Day in 1980, his mother collapsed while walking across her bedroom. A series of tests at the hospital where she was warned revealed that there was an excessive amount of carbon monoxide in her blood stream.

He says: “She was never the same again. Her immune system just shut down and her body couldn't fight anything chemical. She walked around with a mask and an oxygen tank, lived in a room covered with aluminium foil and had to eat special food.”

Then only four, he was forced to grow up quickly. “I helped to look after her, and had to learn how to clean and cook.”

But the “good kid who grew up in church and played piano on Sundays” turned rebellious when he was 18.

“I formed a rock band called Sunday River, grew my hair to my shoulders and moved to New York to become rich and famous,” he says with a laugh.

That dream lasted only a few months. Sunday River disbanded “because we hated each other”.

He hopped over to the other side of entertainment and became a club promoter.

“I covered 40 clubs, the types that models, celebrities and all the beautiful people go to. People would come and spend US\$1,000 on a bottle of champagne,” says Mr Harrison, who got a commission from all sales and was so good at what he did that alcohol companies paid him to drink their brands in public.

“I was on the inside of a one-way glass, deciding who came in, who sat where. There was a power to it.”

It was a lucrative living; he earned a few thousand dollars on a good night.

Along the way, he picked up “every vice imaginable” – drinking, gambling, drugs and pornography.

“I was chasing all the markers of success, which I thought would bring happiness. I dated models on the covers of magazines, drove a BMW, bought a Rolex, had a grand piano in my apartment and got the perfect labrador retriever.”

This decadent lifestyle went on for 10 years. To his credit, he man-

aged to graduate from New York University with a journalism degree during this period.

He says: “My parents had saved up for my college education, and writing and photography were easy for me so I thought I should at least get a degree. But I never used it.”

On a trip to Punta del Este in South America, he had an epiphany.

“I had flown there in someone's private jet. We rented a compound with servants and people who waited on us. There were magnums of Dom Perignon and I remember spending US\$1,000 on fireworks,” he says.

The holiday embodied everything that he had worked for, but he felt empty.

“I realised I'd never find happiness like that and I needed a big change. There'd never be enough. Someone would always have a more beautiful woman or a better watch or a more powerful car.”

He adds: “I felt emotionally and morally corrupt. I had served no one in 10 years. I hadn't sent a cheque to a charity, I hadn't volunteered, I was living only for myself. I asked myself, ‘What would be the opposite of my current life? What if I left everything? What would that feel like or look like?’”

He decided he could not continue to give short shrift to the Christian values he was raised on.

Leaving the bright lights and big parties of New York City was a struggle. But the deal was sealed when someone threatened his life in a nightclub one night.

He sold everything in his possession, called it quits with the girlfriend he did not love and hit the road in a rented cobalt-blue Mustang.

“I went all the way to Maine and, in a dial-up Internet cafe, started putting in applications to humanitarian organisations which turned me down because they didn't know how a nightclub promoter would be useful to them,” he says.

Finally, Mercy Ships replied and said he could join the charity as a photojournalist on condition that he paid it US\$500 a month.

That was how he ended up in Liberia, then a country still reeling from two civil wars which had killed 250,000 people and shrunk the economy by 90 per cent.

The doctors on Mercy Ships, he says, “specialised in treating people with giant facial tumours, flesh-eating diseases, cleft palates and those who had been burnt during the war”.

What he saw on the third day of his sojourn still stays with him.

“We had scheduled 1,500 surgery slots and the government had given us a stadium to triage the patients as they came. I went out that morning all ready to capture the action but when I turned the corner, I saw that more than 5,000 people had turned up for the limited slots,” he



Mr Scott Harrison (second from left) with his water project workers. His charity has funded 30,000 water projects in 26 countries. PHOTO: CHARITY: WATER

Bringing clean water to those in need

SCAN TO WATCH

ST

http://str.sg/scottharrison

says, adding that he was particularly perturbed by the sight of a 10-year-old who had such a giant facial tumour that he was literally suffocating.

Over 12 intense months, Mr Harrison shot 50,000 photos which he would send to his mailing list of 15,000 people from his clubbing days.

Some of them blocked him, while others gave money and yet others began to volunteer.

After a year, he returned to New York, staged an exhibition of the photos and raised US\$96,000, which he donated to Mercy Ships before embarking on a second voluntary stint.

This time, he ventured into villages where he saw people drinking green and brown water from swamps.

He found out more – that one in 10 people around the world does not have access to clean water, and that many live in isolated areas and have to walk for hours to collect water for their families, an exercise which keeps children out of schools and adults from work.

Mr Harrison had found his cause. Back in New York in 2006, he

started charity: water in the living room of his friend's apartment. He was so passionate that he would make up to 10 presentations a day to anyone who would listen.

But he found that people were distrustful of charities. Many said they didn't know where and how their money would be spent.

“I realised that if I was actually going to bring clean water to the whole world and get people to care about an issue which affects one in 10 people worldwide, I would need a new business model,” he says.

It explains why charity: water is structured to commit 100 per cent of all donations to water projects. The overheads and staff costs of running the outfit are financed by another channel.

It is also big on transparency. Every completed project is mapped using technology such as Google Maps, so that supporters know what water projects are funded where and who they are helping.

He adds: “The third thing is, we work with local partners and every project has to be culturally relevant and sustainable.”

To get the charity off the ground, Mr Harrison “donated” his 31st

birthday. Leveraging on his old nightclub connections, he wrangled free space and drinks, and invited 700 people, who had to drop US\$20 each into a box on their way in.

The event raised US\$15,000 which was used to rehabilitate six wells in a Ugandan refugee camp.

The idea took traction, with celebrities including Will and Jada Smith, Jessica Biel and Justin Bieber “donating” their birthdays to raise money for the charity.

Mr Harrison has two young children with his wife, who used to work in charity: water. He pauses to tell the story of Rachel Beckwith from Seattle, who had heard him speak and hoped to raise US\$300 on her ninth birthday for the charity in 2011.

She was disappointed when she fell US\$80 short, but resolved to do better the next year. But a few weeks after her birthday, she was killed in a 20-car pile-up – the only fatality.

Mr Harrison says: “Rachel's family wanted to honour her last wish – for children she had never met to have clean water. Her fund-raising campaign was restarted, word spread and people started donating \$9 each in America, then Europe and Asia, and Africa. From just US\$220, her campaign eventually raised US\$1.3 million.”

On the first anniversary of Rachel's death, he took her mother and grandmother to Ethiopia, where they went from village to village, meeting the nearly 38,000 children she had helped.

From just US\$2 million in the first year, the charity – which hires 80 people in New York and 900 globally – now raises about US\$80 million a year.

Mr Harrison's work has been endorsed by the likes of Bill Gates and Richard Branson. He has also been recognised by Fortune's 40 under 40 list, Forbes' Impact 30 list, and he was ranked No. 10 in Fast Company's 100 Most Creative People in Business.

Thirst, his book about his journey, is a New York Times bestseller, with proceeds donated to his charity.

“I feel I haven't done enough,” says the philanthropist, who spoke at The Straits Clan last week. The event was organised by The Lo & Behold Group, which raised \$27,000 for charity: water last year.

Mr Harrison reckons his work is cut out for him.

“The ultimate vision is that no one is drinking bad water. We do not have answers for many global problems, like diseases we do not know how to cure, but water's not like that. It's a completely solvable problem,” he says.

“We won't stop fighting until everyone has access to clean water.”

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As part of the Government's commitment to develop people, it has spent over \$130,000 on each Singaporean child for the first 10 years of school, and another \$15,000 to \$23,000 more for every year of post-secondary and tertiary education, says the writer. And through SkillsFuture, it also supports lifelong learning so that Singaporeans can access good jobs despite disruption. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

S'pore's middle way: Growing economy, caring for its people

Indranee Rajah

In his piece, "Singapore 50 years ago and now: An Asian middle way?" in last week's Insight, Professor Steve Kelman applauded Singapore's growth and alleviation of poverty but wondered if we had become "more corporatism than cause".

He hoped Singapore could continue to show the world a middle way between the excesses of capitalism and an unsustainable welfare state.

It is heartening that we have international friends who have followed our progress through the years, and who wish us well. For that reason, I felt that I should assure Prof Kelman and other friends that the People's Action Party (PAP) Government remains true to its mission of a fair and just society, by creating opportunities for all, redistributing wealth according to need, and effective social spending.

We are doing this in a way unique to Singapore, through innovative policies evolved over the years. We have avoided ideological straitjackets, focusing instead on what really works, as encapsulated in the PAP founding leaders' 1970s essay collection titled: Socialism That Works... The Singapore Way. Take taxes.

Conventional Western orthodoxy is that social justice must necessarily be achieved through higher taxes. By that measure, the higher the tax rates, the more just and fair a society ought to be.

Yet Singapore bucks this – topping as it does global indices for key social outcomes such as education, healthcare and home ownership, ahead of countries with significantly higher tax rates than ours, as shown by the recent World Bank Human Capital Index.

And despite our generally low tax rates, our social ministries' expenditure has doubled between FY2009 and FY2018. How have we been able to manage this?

First, we do not solely rely on taxes. Our revenue is supplemented by the net investment returns contributions (NIRC), that is, income on our reserves, a feature unique to Singapore.

The NIRC has more than doubled from \$7 billion in FY2009 to \$16 billion in FY2018. Without this annual injection, we would have had to double our personal income tax or goods and services tax (GST)



The CPF Service Centre in Maxwell Road. The CPF system of national personal savings, topped up by contributions from employers and the Government, can be used for education, housing, healthcare and retirement needs. ST PHOTO: FELINE LIM



The provision of high-quality public housing and generous subsidies has enabled about 90 per cent home ownership, says the writer. When HDB leases end, there are plans for schemes to rebuild and rejuvenate precincts. ST PHOTO: JOSEPH CHUA

collection to raise the same amount of revenue.

Second, we maintain fiscal prudence and avoid high debt. Many governments in countries with tax rates higher than ours have to use part of those revenues to

service debts they or predecessor governments have accumulated; it does not all go to public spending.

Third, it is not just how much you tax, but also how effectively you collect and use that tax.

We have a robust tax collection

system to prevent leakage.

We insist on good governance to avoid wastage.

We crack down on corruption to prevent rot.

We push for efficiency, productivity, and value for money

so that the public gets maximum return on its tax dollars.

All this is driven by our unwavering and unyielding determination to secure good outcomes for our people out of limited resources.

We are firmly committed to the redistribution of wealth. But we are acutely conscious that in order to redistribute wealth, you must first have wealth to redistribute.

Hence, our strong focus on growing the economy and making Singapore an attractive destination for companies and businesses. We are not preoccupied with growth for growth's sake, but because growth creates jobs and gives our people good incomes while generating the tax revenues necessary to help our elderly, the vulnerable and disadvantaged, and meet other vital public needs like defence and infrastructure.

We are a small country. We have to compete with countries far bigger and with greater resources. The stark reality is that if tax rates are pushed too high, it will also push people and businesses that can generate wealth not to stay here, with knock-on adverse consequences.

Reinstating our 1987 corporate tax rates of 40 per cent would be a crushing burden on our companies and render us uncompetitive, resulting in loss of investments, jobs and revenues.

Our ability to achieve social outcomes beyond that of other countries, despite generally low tax rates, is the result of a carefully calibrated combination of maintaining a broad tax base, diverse sources of revenue, viable economic strategies, sound governance, and fiscal prudence.

If our needs go up, and we have no choice but to raise taxes (such as GST), we will do so, but will keep it within a sustainable range – allowing us to meet needs, stay competitive, but not imposing an intolerable burden and cushioning the impact on those who feel it most.

We maintain a system that is fair and progressive. Half of our working population does not have to pay tax. Of those who do, the ones who earn more, pay more.

On redistribution, we ensure that those who need more, get more.

- The lower-income get close to \$4 in government benefits for every dollar paid in taxes, through social transfers such as GST Vouchers, Workfare, Silver Support, and high healthcare, housing and childcare subsidies. They do not incur personal income tax. They incur GST, but that is offset by vouchers, and so effectively, the impact of GST is reduced.
- The middle-income group receives more than \$2 in government benefits for every dollar paid in taxes.

There are other features unique to Singapore that have enabled our pursuit of a better life for our people:

- Our commitment to develop our people. We spend over \$130,000 on each Singaporean child for the first 10 years of school, and another \$15,000 to \$23,000 more for every year of post-secondary and tertiary education. Through SkillsFuture, we encourage and support lifelong learning so that Singaporeans can access good jobs despite disruption and change.
- Our Central Provident Fund system of national personal savings, topped up by contributions from employers and Government that can be used for education, housing, healthcare and retirement needs.
- Our provision of high-quality public housing and generous subsidies has enabled about 90 per cent home ownership. The value of the property appreciates as the country grows, and can be monetised for retirement needs. When HDB leases end, we have plans for new programmes to rebuild and rejuvenate precincts.

If we were truly an unbridled corporation, we would not put back revenue from land sales into past reserves, or refrain from using up all the income from our reserves. But we do, because we believe that we must keep something for our children and grandchildren.

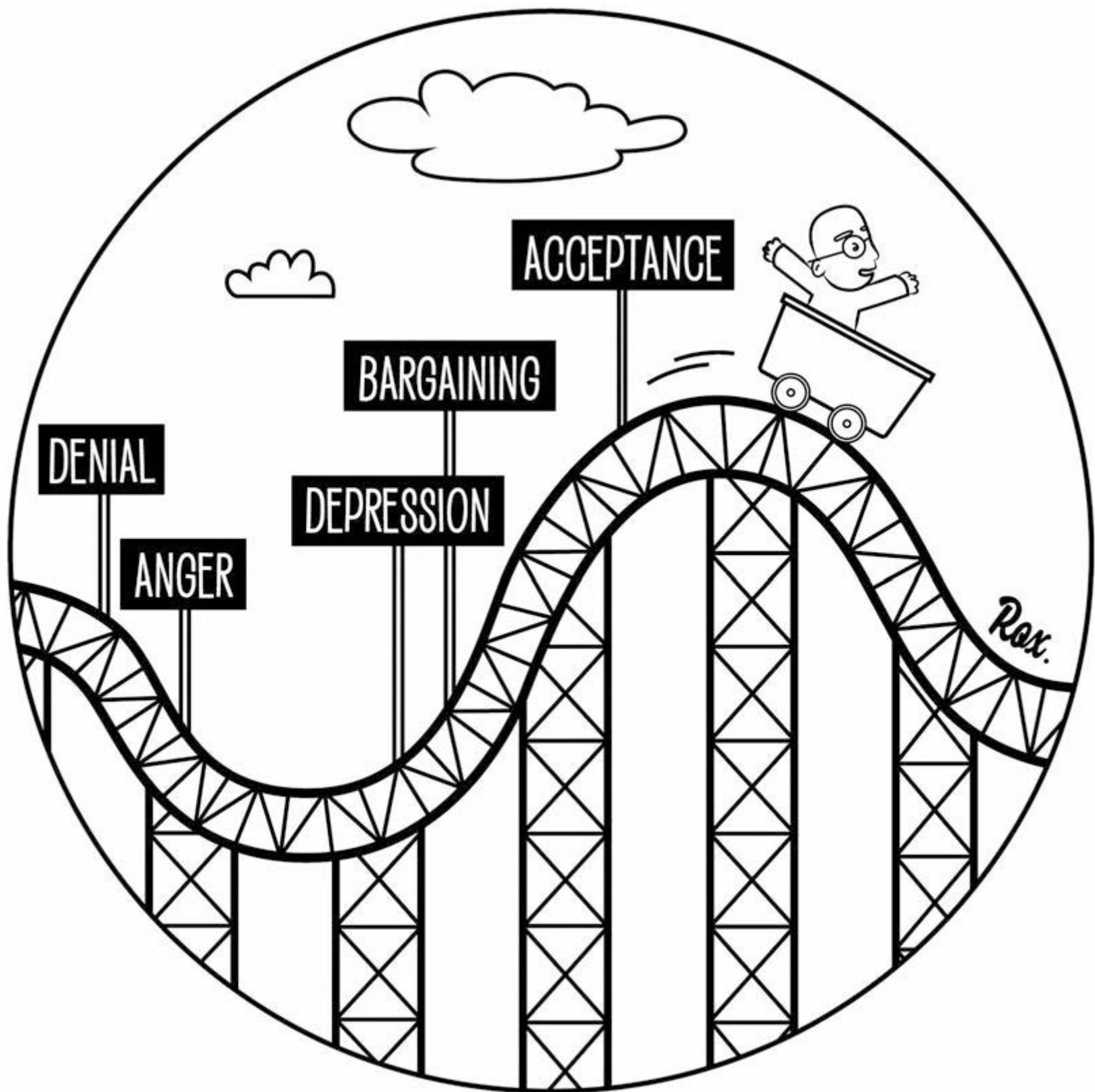
For the PAP Government, Singaporeans and Singapore remain very much our cause.

Our means may be capitalist but our objectives and goals are caring and compassionate. Our economy is based on free market principles, but its fruits are harnessed to build a fair and inclusive society. We believe in effectiveness of approach but equity in outcomes.

Ours is a middle way uniquely our own.

- The writer is Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Finance and Education.

Conventional Western orthodoxy is that social justice must necessarily be achieved through higher taxes. By that measure, the higher the tax rates, the more just and fair a society ought to be. Yet Singapore bucks this – topping as it does global indices for key social outcomes such as education, healthcare and home ownership, ahead of countries with significantly higher tax rates than ours, as shown by the recent World Bank Human Capital Index.



A roller-coaster journey through grief

Emotions can range from shock to anger, from anger to guilt, and from guilt to denial

William Wan

My mother was everything to me. When she died, I was in the United States and was told only after she had died. She had instructed my sister not to inform me until she expired because I had come back a year before when she was critically ill. Amazingly, she recovered, and I returned to the US after spending some time with her, though she thought she had wasted my time then as I had come back to Singapore “for nothing”. She told my sister not to call me since she could still recover from her illness as she did then. But, should she pass away, I was to return immediately to conduct her funeral!

That’s my mother. She was very down-to-earth and practical. She passed on at 88 years old with a mind as sharp as a razor, my sister told me. She talked about death and dying in a matter-of fact manner, my sister said, and she gave specific instructions days before she expired that she wanted me to be back to conduct her funeral service.

That’s exactly my mother, as I remembered her. I recall once picking her up in my arms from the wheelchair to set her up in my car. I asked her if she was afraid because her days were numbered. She smiled and said: “I should be all right because I am going to be with Jesus.” She was a woman of simple faith, and there was no fear in her eyes, only hope.

I was comforted by her attitude towards death and her fortitude in hope when death was averted. When she knew she was dying, she did not insist that I, her son, should be there for her. She did not want to waste my time, she said. I could come when I was needed to conduct her funeral.

I did conduct her funeral where I preached on one of her favourite biblical texts – Jesus said to her: “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.”

It was a comforting service, those

who attended observed.

As her son and minister at her funeral, I held up well. After all, we were there to celebrate her life and the words I spoke were comforting, reassuring and positive – even as the scriptural text was. The faith tradition I embrace encourages us to grieve, but not as a people without hope. That, in practice, means that there is very little weeping in public. We have forgotten that even Jesus wept in public because of his friend Lazarus’ death.

But when the dust settled, I found myself grieving. Up to that point, I had understood grief from two sources – from my seminary studies and from the people I ministered to in their grief. My mother’s death generated a deep sad feeling of loss, a wish that she had not died and a swirling feeling of missing her dearly. I found myself weeping for the loss of my beloved mother.

As I grieved, I was reminded that grief is a natural response to loss and is often associated with the loss of someone you love. The most common effects of grieving are sleeplessness, loneliness, loss of appetite and distancing from people who care for you.

DIFFERENT STAGES OF GRIEF

The more beloved the deceased, the more intense the pain of loss you feel deep inside you. Different people experience different levels of emotional suffering and at its deepest level, it can be overwhelming. Emotions range from shock to anger, from anger to guilt and from guilt to denial. In all of these, there is usually a sense of profound sadness.

Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross researched the feelings of patients facing terminal illness and, in 1969, wrote about the “five stages of grief”. These are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. They “are a part of the framework that makes up our learning to live with the one(s) we lost. They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling. But they are not stops

on some linear timeline in grief”.

Denial takes place when the loss is sudden or unexpected and the reaction is: “This can’t be happening to me!” Often, there is anger and the question “Where is God when I needed Him?” is asked. “Why is this happening?” is another question that reveals anger.

One of the most poignant texts I received reads:

“Dear William, thank you for checking in on me. Yes, we could get together some time. I could do with some company. It has been three weeks since his passing but the pain of loss is as raw and intense as if it was just yesterday when he suffered a heart attack. God saw two very happily married people and decided that’s enough happiness for them. One must die and the other remain with nothing but all the time in the world to grieve. What kind of God is that?”

The reaction is one of shock and disbelief. It is very difficult for my friend to accept what had transpired – one moment they were happily together, and the next, the husband was gone. The denial can lead to a state where you continue to expect that deceased to show up even though you know that they are gone for good. But denial need not be all negative. Kubler-Ross opines that “denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief. There is a grace in denial. It is nature’s way of letting in only as much as we can handle”.

In the case of an accident, the loss could have been caused by someone’s negligence. I know of folks who died in hospitals and their loved ones blamed the doctors or the healthcare system for failing to do a good job. These reactions are also driven by the raw emotion of anger. I can see why my friend was angry with God. I can also see why doctors and sometimes the deceased person can be blamed for abandoning you. There is a sense of injustice done to you and you feel the right to be angry.

Bargaining may also take place as a symptom of desperation. “Make this not happen, and I promise to...” This need to reset may be the result of guilt and fear. You can feel guilty for all kinds of real or perceived neglect – things you said or didn’t say, things you did or didn’t do.

One of my friends felt guilty that she could not revive her husband when he had a heart seizure, even though she had done her best in the circumstances and there was nothing more she could do. You may also feel guilty to feel relieved when your loved one dies after a long, difficult illness.

You may bargain out of fear, leading to a plethora of anxiety, insecurity, helplessness and worries. You may even have panic attacks as you must face life without a helpmeet whom you had depended on for a good part of your life. The thought of having to shoulder your responsibilities alone could be so overwhelming that you wish you could reset and get back to first base.

Depression is not uncommon among the bereaved, especially when death is sudden. Often, it is the result of guilt. One of my friends who migrated to Australia suffered a great tragedy. His eldest son celebrated his 18th birthday with the joy of passing the driving test and getting his driving licence. Soon after, he attempted to back the car from the driveway without realising that his younger brother was on a tricycle just behind him. He ran over him, causing the death of his brother. Though he was acquitted because it was an unfortunate accident, he suffered years of severe depression even as he grieved deeply for the brother he loved. Thankfully, he did recover and is today a successful physician.

DON’T SUPPRESS YOUR TEARS

In my work as a pastor-counsellor, I have come across several misunderstandings about grief. One of the most common is to advise the grieving person to be strong. But if that means that you stoically bear the loss without expressing your sadness, loneliness and fear, that you don’t cry, then you are being told to unnecessarily resist what is natural. Crying because of emotional pain and sadness is a natural response and should not be suppressed.

“Tears are the silent language of grief,” wrote Voltaire. Expressing our true feelings will facilitate healing. It is in facing the pain authentically that you can begin to deal with it. Ignoring it is not helpful.

Deep sadness is probably the

most universally experienced symptom of grief. Losing someone you love dearly brings about painful feelings of emptiness, loneliness, yearning and despair. Your emotions are destabilised, and you may cry uncontrollably. That is not a bad thing. According to neuroscientist William H. Frey II, who spent over 20 years studying crying and tears, “crying is not only a human response to sorrow and frustration, it’s a healthy one”.

Apparently, only human beings shed tears in response to emotional stress. Crying is an expression of acknowledging your feelings of loss. It is not a sign of weakness, but of strength as it implies healthy relationships and elicits empathy that draws individuals closer to one another. It is a natural way to reduce emotional stress by reducing blood pressure that, if left unchecked, can become chronic and increase the risk of cardiovascular disease including stroke and heart failure, cause tension headache and migraine, contribute to ulcers and other stress-related disorders.

Emotional stress increases the level of cortisol which can wreak havoc on the body. Tears reduce that harmful chemical. They also reduce the level of manganese, a min-

eral which affects mood and is found in significantly greater concentration in tears than in blood serum. Elevated levels of manganese in the body are associated with anxiety, irritability and aggression. Research also shows that 85 per cent of women and 73 per cent of men feel less sad and angry after shedding some tears. “Humans’ ability to cry has survival value,” Frey emphasises. Thankfully, over time, acceptance will take place as part of the healing process.

The best sign of acceptance and healing is when you can move on. Moving on, however, does not mean forgetting. Keeping the memory of someone you lost as an important part of you is an important aspect of healing. It is when you can invoke the memory of the person you loved and talk fondly about him or her without the pain of loss that you can say you are truly healed.

It is crucial to remember that our emotions are messy. These emotional stages are not sequential, they merely describe the kinds of emotions that are thrown up when a person is grieving. Kubler-Ross did not intend for these stages to be a rigid framework that applies to everyone who mourns. In 2004, she said of the five stages of grief: “They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss. Our grieving is as individual as our lives.”

It is equally important to know that grieving is a highly individual experience – there’s no right or wrong way to grieve. How you grieve depends on many factors, including your personality and coping style, your life experience, your faith, and how significant the loss was to you.

Grief is the function of love. Or as Queen Elizabeth II put it, “grief is the price we pay for love”. The greater the love, the deeper the grief. There would be no grief only when there is no love expended on others.

All healing happens gradually – you can’t plan or schedule it and you can’t force or hurry it along. Some people get over it in weeks or months. Some take years. However you grieve, be yourself and give yourself the space and time to heal.

I EXPERIENCED GUILT

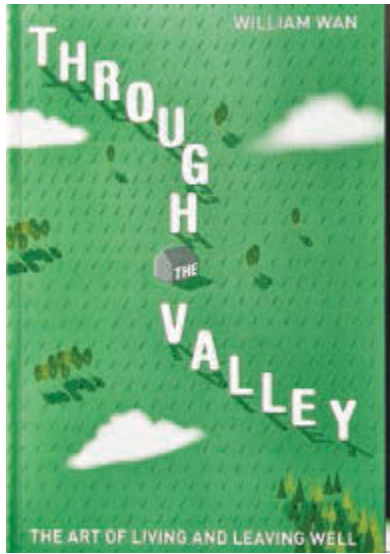
My own experience of grief was more like taking a roller-coaster ride. I was not in denial, but was struck with a sense of guilt. I was living in the US at that time and had been away for more than 10 years. Mom did stay with us in Canada for just over a year. She and my wife got along famously and she loved her three grandchildren. She used to knit scarves and mittens for the kids. But the weather was too cold for her, and she did not speak English. Her friends were all in Singapore and she decided to return to stay with my sister. I did not have the privilege of taking care of her in her old age.

My emotions went up and down. There were good days and bad days. I had some of her pictures with me and recalled the memorable times with her. I started to write about her as I recalled the events of the distant past – the time when she piggy-backed me to visit friends. I remembered placing my ear on her back and hearing clearly the rhythm of her heartbeat! I recalled going with her to the wet market and the Chinese medicinal shop. The scenes flashed before me, and the smell, too – a mixture of rancidity and putrefying odour of exposed meat and fish in a rather humid atmosphere, and the sweet-smelling aromatic Chinese herbal medicine in the Chinese medicinal shop owned by one of her friends was quite addictive.

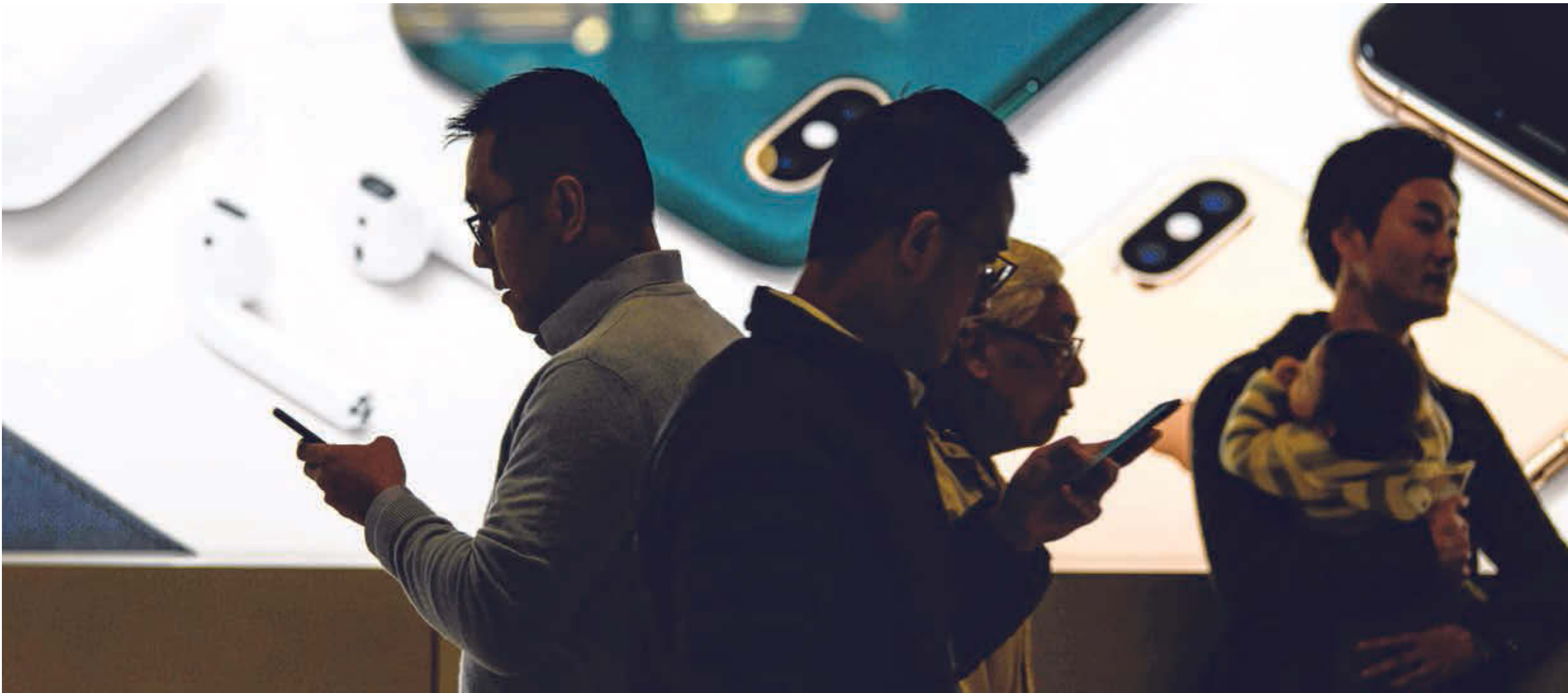
Writing about my mom and recalling the faces were cathartic for me. It helped me manage my emotions. Remembering my mother through photos and flashbacks of events seemed to fill the hole created by her physical absence. It worked for me, but for others, it may work in a different way.

Recently, five of us took a friend out to dinner. She had lost her husband a few months ago. We sat down at a table set for six. As soon as we were seated, our widowed friend started to weep. Looking at the empty seat diagonally across from her, she said: “That is for my husband. I missed him so much.” We were glad she could talk about him because we were afraid that she was beginning to distance herself from all her friends and nursing her pain in silence.

It is always helpful to express your feelings in writing. Write about your loss in a journal or a letter, saying the things you’ve always wanted to say but did not say. Create a scrapbook of memorabilia or photo album celebrating the person’s life; or get involved in a cause or organisation that was important to your loved one.



This is an excerpt from the book **Through The Valley: The Art Of Living And Leaving Well**, by **William Wan**. It is published by **Straits Times Press** and retails at **\$30 (inclusive of GST)**



Making an app to make a difference in society

Technology engineers have long served big profitable businesses well, while apps focusing on what more altruistic organisations need remained sparse. But that’s changing.

Tina Rosenberg

There really isn’t an app for everything. At least not for everyone.

Mr Avi Karnani first noticed that tech gap when he was just out of business school, working on mergers and acquisitions for Citigroup Global Markets. “At my corporation there was all this great financial tech available to help them manage their risk and achieve anything they wanted,” he said. “But my friends had high-interest credit cards, and high-fee checking accounts and their student loans were incomprehensible. They were calling me up for help, and they didn’t have access to anything like that.”

If you run a business, or you’re a consumer of means, there’s a technology solution for every problem you could imagine, and many you probably can’t. But if you’re in financial trouble, or have problems typical of low-income people, sorry. It’s an analogue world for you.

Still, there are some successes. Propel’s Fresh EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) app helps people manage their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programme (Snap) benefits. Mr Karnani is the chief executive and co-founder of Alice, a company that automates pre-tax benefits to enable companies to offer them and let more employees use them. Those benefits can add hundreds or thousands of dollars to a worker’s pay cheque. But while white-collar employees can usually get them, most hourly workers can’t.

Good Call links people arrested in New York City to a lawyer – within seconds. JustFix.nyc helps New York City tenants respond to eviction notices, compel landlords to make repairs, and represent themselves in housing court.

Those four companies got their start at a tech incubator called Blue Ridge Labs, which is part of Robin Hood, a New York City anti-poverty organisation. It’s the most productive (and possibly the only) early-stage incubator for tech companies trying to solve a social problem.

Profit-focused tech companies have lots of tech start-up havens where they can get capital, mentorship, colleagues and a chance to

show their products; Y Combinator is the best known.

For beginning start-ups seeking social impact, the most prominent organisation has been Blue Ridge.

Companies in a slightly more advanced stage can apply to Fast Forward in the Bay Area of California, and JPMorgan Chase’s Financial Solutions Lab has fellowships for work on financial apps. Some companies win fellowships at more than one lab.

In addition, some other big organisations are now making apps. Code for America makes Clear My Record, which automates legal expungements, and GetCalFresh, which signs people up for California’s Snap food assistance programme. The International Rescue Committee runs the Airbel Centre, which makes technology to help refugees. (Y Combinator accepts a few social-impact-focused tech companies each year.)

For profit-focused tech companies, accelerators are very helpful. But for social tech, they’re a necessity. This technology is generally more complex to create, and much more difficult to finance.

Most low-income people don’t have a computer. So apps need to work on a phone. They should be easy to use for people with little financial sophistication. And they need to work with skimpy data plans. “Text messaging is great,” Mr Karnani said.

When a business contracts with Alice, its employees link their credit and debit cards to Alice’s software. It automatically identifies eligible purchases – healthcare, childcare, commuting expenses – and moves the expense to the pre-tax category.

On payday, Alice texts the employee that the tax she would have paid has been added to her pay cheque. “The phone is going to ding and you see that money,” Mr Karnani said. “You bought a Metro card; here’s fifty dollars.”

That’s important, he said. Many poor people have had bad experiences with traditional power structures, such as banks, and don’t trust them. “They’re not going to do it unless they see someone else they know and trust doing it without becoming a victim,” he said. “So it’s

great if someone can show their phone message to a friend. The friend says, ‘Hey, I bought a Metro card and I didn’t get fifty dollars. I want my fifty dollars.’”

Those are small challenges for app makers. Here’s a very big one: Your audience has very limited ability to pay. So how will you make money?

Financial apps can often figure out a business model; Alice, for example, takes half of the amount of money it saves employers on payroll taxes. But tech companies like JustFix and Good Call are non-profits that must raise money from philanthropy. “It was an uphill battle for us initially, as traditional philanthropic sources of capital are not used to funding technology,” said Mr Georges Clement, co-founder and president of JustFix. Fund raising is a constant preoccupation for both companies.

Most venture capitalists won’t look at investing in tech firms that have no chance of bringing in big returns – 30 times the value of their investment, or more. To choose those companies, they usually look to what’s worked in the past.

Venture capitalist Ben Horowitz of Andreessen Horowitz famously said companies that succeed are founded by “college dropouts with insane ideas going after tiny markets with no way to monetise”. (Just to be clear, “college dropouts” in this case means the likes of Mr Mark Zuckerberg and Mr Steve Jobs, not students from the local community college.)

Looking for what has worked in the past is called pattern-matching. It’s an obvious strategy, but it’s really harmful. “Firms are starting to understand that the historical data is incredibly biased, and pattern-matching just ends up confirming those biases moving forward,” Mr Clement said.

Investors apply pattern-matching to both people and products; this hurts socially focused tech. Ms Hannah Calhoon, managing director of Blue Ridge, said: “It’s people who don’t look like their mental images of founders, and markets that don’t look like what people think are markets.”

Co-executive director of Good Call, Mr Jelani Anglin, is unusual in the tech world. He’s from Far Rockaway, Queens – “median income, \$38,000 per year”, he said – and his background is in community organising. “Understanding what our community truly needs has been hard for me to portray,” he said.

It has been especially difficult to explain to potential investors a feature of Good Call that allows people to list contact information for their friends and family members, so that Good Call can notify them in case of an arrest. (The police take your phone when you’re arrested. Got those numbers in your head? Me neither.) “Walking to the store, you can be snatched up. That’s a real thing,” Mr Anglin said, but it’s hard for outsiders to understand.

No venture capital? Then founders have to bring their own money. Few can. “Hey, why don’t you leave your job at Google and pay yourself US\$40,000 (\$\$54,300) a year for something that might fail?” said Ms Calhoon. “That’s a really different conversation for many people than for someone like Mark Zuckerberg.”

This matters because people tend to build products for themselves. They fill a need they know, in a world they know. Mr Anglin cares about making the criminal justice system fairer. Many tech founders might not even have been aware of its inequities.

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Tech accelerators can help by providing money, talented peers and mentoring when the market will not. But perhaps the most important thing Blue Ridge provides is something completely different: connections to the community.

Tech is a macho world. The tech hero disrupts existing systems... But social tech is different. It doesn’t replace existing systems. Instead, it makes them work better. “You can’t move fast and break things,” said Mr Bill Cromie, director of tech innovation at Blue Ridge. “If you are trying to make a difference in serious systemic challenges facing low-income populations, you can’t operate in a vacuum.”

Tech accelerators can help by providing money, talented peers and mentoring when the market will not. But perhaps the most important thing Blue Ridge provides is something completely different: connections to the community.

Tech is a macho world. The tech hero disrupts existing systems. He goes it alone. That can work with certain commercial tech projects. A bring-me-booze-right-now app that puts together buyers and sellers can be created largely through technology.

But social tech is different. It doesn’t replace existing systems. Instead, it makes them work better. “You can’t move fast and break things,” said Mr Bill Cromie, director of tech innovation at Blue Ridge. “If you are trying to make a difference in serious systemic challenges facing low-income populations, you can’t operate in a vacuum.”

Mr Clement said JustFix’s partnerships with community organisations with a long history of helping tenants are “the thing that has been most important in our organisation’s success”.

“It really does take a village,” Ms Calhoon said. “You are working with others with the exact same goal. Disrupting is disruptive not only to the ecosystem, but also to your own ability to achieve your aim.”

Blue Ridge requires companies to include a subject matter expert – one of Mr Anglin’s jobs for Good Call. It also ensures that companies talk to community members all the time. It has a Design Insight Group, made up of people in the target audience paid to meet with companies and talk about their lives. And companies go into the community to watch and listen. “We don’t design with the community in mind,” Mr Anglin said. “We design with the community.”

The founders of JustFix (one of whom was active in a tenant’s organisation) spent weeks talking to tenants, their advocates, Legal Aid lawyers and housing court judges. “It was without a doubt the most valuable thing that Blue Ridge does,” Mr Clement said.

The group came in focused on helping tenants, and the process showed them how.

“Our biggest insight came from observing housing court proceedings,” Mr Clement said. “We were sitting in the back for days and days, watching as countless tenants came in and didn’t have legal representation – and the landlord did. The tenants would come in with a plastic grocery bag filled with different documents. The judge would ask them to describe needed repairs, and they’d take their phones and start swiping through photos. The judge would say, ‘We can’t enter this information as evidence, because we’d have to keep your phone.’”

The need to listen to the audience doesn’t go away. Mr Malik Reeves, who is the community engagement coordinator for Good Call, was a user of the hotline. “I got a lawyer within 39 seconds,” he said. He and his interns spend their time in the community. “The proximity thing is important,” he said.

“The ground team is so important,” Mr Anglin said. “Sometimes tech is guilty of being analytically smart, but socially inept.” NYTIMES

Social tech is generally more complex to create, and more difficult to finance. Most low-income people don’t have a computer, so the apps need to work on a phone, and should be easy to use for people with little financial sophistication, says the writer. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

• Tina Rosenberg won a Pulitzer Prize for her book, *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe’s Ghosts After Communism*. She is a former editorial writer for *The Times* and the author, most recently, of *Join The Club: How Peer Pressure Can Transform The World and the World War II spy story e-book D For Deception*.

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OBITUARIES



WILLIE YEO OON HYE

Age : 86

was called home to be with the Lord on 16 February 2019 leaving behind loved ones.

Wife: Anna Ooi Kim Yeok

Son:
Andrew Yeo Seng Hee

Daughter-in-law:
Jenny Chien Siu Kwan

Granddaughters:
Valerie Yeo Tising Lei
Sabrina Yeo Hwee Lei

Brothers:
Yeo Oon Joo (Deceased)
Yeo Oon Chip (Deceased)
Yeo Oon Keong (Deceased)
Yeo Oon Seng (Deceased)
Yeo Oon Teck

Sisters-in-law:
Ching Gek Luang
Leong Yoke Ping

Lee Lai Cheng

Sister:
Yeo Lee Neo

And all relatives and friends.

Wake is held at 30 Sallim Road, Church of Saint Stephen, Prayer Room 1, S'pore 387639.

Cortege leaves on Monday, 18 February 2019 at 2.15pm for funeral Mass at Church of Saint Stephen at 2.30pm thereafter for Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 4.30pm.

"With the Lord there is mercy and plentiful redemption." Psalm 130:7



Fr William Heng CSsR

Returned peacefully to the Lord at the age of 65.
30 May 1954 - 15 February 2019

The Redeptorists and his family rejoice that he has celebrated his life and journey in Jesus's name.

Mother: Agnes Yeo Cheng Tee

Father: Peter Heng Teck Kim (deceased)

Sisters:
Margaret Heng
Christina Heng

Brothers:
Robert Heng
Victor Heng (deceased)
Edward Heng
Richard Heng
Alex Heng

Brothers-in-law:
Philip Woon (deceased)
Paul Ng (deceased)

Sisters-in-law:

Annie Toh
Theresa Tan (deceased)
Karen Chan
Janice Chionh

Nephews, nieces, grandnephews, grandnieces, godsons, goddaughters, relatives and loved ones.

Wake is held at Novena Church, Basement 2, Scala Room, 300 Thomson Road, Singapore 307653.

Funeral Mass will be held on Monday 18 February 2019 at Novena Church at 2.30pm, thereafter to Mandai Crematorium Hall 4 for cremation at 5.00pm.

The family requests no wreaths please.



Mr Bernard Fong Fook Chak

Departed on 15 February 2019

Mr Bernard Fong will always be remembered by the Alumni as the Principal who sustained the college spirit, morale and standards in its darkest days when it had to evacuate overnight to temporary campuses in 1987.

He was much loved by staff and students

as he was always the true gentleman,

soft spoken, understanding and supportive of them.



The Hwa Chong Junior College Alumni,
all former students and staff

"His Lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant."
Matthew 25:21



Chia Hock Kiat

Age: 81

Was called home to be with the Lord on 15 February 2019. Deeply missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Bunty
Son & Daughter-in-law:
Humphrey & Chai-lee
Daughter & Son-in-law:
Helen & Adrian

Granddaughters:
Tanya, Tessa, Alexis and Nicole
Sisters: Gek Choo and Sook Kim
And all relatives and friends.

Wake at Singapore Casket Level 3, Pearl Hall, 131 Lavender Street, Singapore 338737.
Nightly services at 8.00pm.

Cortege leaves on Wednesday 20 February 2019 at 9.20am for Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 10.20am.

"To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone." Titus 3:2
~ That's who kong kong was ~



TENG TIN HOW STEVEN

Age : 68

passed away peacefully on 15 February 2019. Deeply missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Ang Ah Kim Alice

Daughters:
Teng Wen Ming Jerinne
Teng Wen Yin Corinne

Sons-in-law:
Lim Chi Hooi Jason
Damian Doennig

Sisters, in-laws, nephews, nieces
all relatives and friends.

Wake is held at Blk 3 Marine Terrace
S'pore 440003.

Cortege will leave on Monday, 18 February 2019 at 5pm for Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 for cremation at 6pm.

12th Anniversary In Loving Memory Of



MDM ONG SIEW LENG

Departed: 17 February 2007

Sadly missed and fondly remembered.

Forever loved and cherished by:
Son, Daughter-in-law,
Daughters, Sons-in-law,
Grandchildren and all loved ones.



RAJAMANIE MURUGESU

Departed: 17.02.88

Dearest Amma & Appa
Only God knows how much we love & miss you.
Remembered by Children, Grandchildren & Relatives

S.MURUGESU

Departed: 25.01.96

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." 2 Timothy 4:7



Bernard Fong Fook Chak

Age: 89

Was called home to be with the Lord on 15 February 2019. Deeply missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Sylvia Pau Sze Nga

Children:
Augustine Fong
Daniel Fong
Esther Fong

Spouses:
Belinda Ang
Carolina Chan

Grandchildren:
Christine Fong
Dominic Fong
Clare Fong
Charles Fong

And all relatives and friends.

Wake is held at Chapel of Repose, Church of St Teresa, 510 Kampong Bahru Road, Singapore 099446.

Cortege leaves on Tuesday 19 February 2019 at 3.15pm for Funeral Mass at Church of St Teresa at 3.30pm, thereafter to Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 5.15pm.

The family of the late



YAP NENG CHEW

Departed on 7 February 2019

wish to express their heartfelt thanks and appreciation to relatives, friends, ex colleagues and business associates for their kind assistance, attendance, condolences, donations and wreaths during their recent bereavement.

"In memoriam" is for the loved ones whom you remember...

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Invest



Me & My Money

Entrepreneur Henric Suuronen plans to cut down on buying stocks directly and invest more in private companies and funds. **B12**

Tips for women

BUDGET, INVEST AND JUST DO IT

Time is money, and procrastination is a thief of time. This takes on greater significance when it comes to the compounding power of money over time.

Ms Evy Wee, head of financial planning and personal investing at DBS Bank, suggests starting by budgeting, which is the key enabler for everything else. Once you know where your money goes, you can make adjustments to carve out a designated budget for saving and investing consistently.

“If in-depth research to ‘spot the star product’ is too arduous, tap options like a regular savings plan or invest in an exchange-traded fund that tracks one or more market indices to leverage the benefits of dollar-cost averaging and longer-term market cycles,” she advises.

MASTER THE BASICS

Mr Deepak Khanna, head of wealth development at HSBC Bank (Singapore), says many people, including women, lack the knowledge and confidence to invest. The best place to start is to master the basics.

“Differentiate between your needs and wants, identify your goals and prioritise them, and understand your risk appetite.”

TAKE OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL

Mr Sam Phoen, co-founder of investment-management firm Wateram Capital, advises women to have their own investment plans and coordinate with their spouses on securing the family’s financial future.

“Draw up investment and cash flow plans to ensure your current living expenses and retirement needs are adequately covered and robust enough to stand the test of time.”

REFRAME HOW YOU THINK ABOUT INVESTMENT

It is easy to put off investing, so reframing your perception is important. Think of it as a first step to achieving your dreams, passions and new adventures. Make sure you make the most of it by planning ahead, suggests Mr Khanna.

INCREMENTAL RISKS, INCREMENTAL RETURNS

No pain, no gain, so the only way to make higher returns is to take on more risks. But many women would rather avoid the pain of negative drawdowns if they can, notes Mr Phoen.

“Anyone who promises higher returns without the need to take on more risks is not telling you the whole truth,” he adds. “Ask, and understand the worst-case scenario. If you think you can stomach the losses in the worst case and the corresponding higher returns are fair, then consider investing.”

“If you are a conservative investor, consider taking incremental risks in exchange for incremental returns. Most times, mildly risky investments are needed to ensure your returns are higher than your time deposit rate and inflation.”

FROM MANAGING TO PLANNING

Managing your finances is not enough. You need to plan where you can save money and by how much, says Mr Khanna. “Use online tools such as saving calculators and budgeting apps to help identify the changes you need to make which will reduce your expenditure and redirect these funds towards savings for your future.”

ASK THE EXPERTS

Mr Khanna’s advice is to seek professional advice, especially if you are a novice in investing and financial planning.

“Having an independent and objective adviser to guide you will help you adopt the best approach. Don’t be afraid to ask questions and get clarity before making decisions. Do approach a few professionals to obtain several opinions before making a decision,” he adds.

Honey, let’s talk about money

It’s an issue couples need to discuss, given differences in investment behaviour



Lorna Tan

Invest Editor

Finance is a difficult subject for many couples to broach and it takes time before they feel comfortable discussing it.

Yet money issues top the list of marriage grouches, so it makes sense for the conversation to start even before you get hitched.

Any marriage preparation programme worth its salt would include a session on financial management where

couples share their spending and saving habits, concerns and aspirations.

Studies show there are gender differences in investing behaviour. State Street research indicated that female investors tend to be more long-term and goal-oriented, less inclined to risk, not so overconfident and not as trusting. Women trade less frequently than men, for example, with 65 per cent of them trading at least quarterly versus 75 per cent of men.

Fewer trades mean lower costs, which may lead to the outperformance found in some studies.

Volatility is more bearable for men, with 58 per cent of them moving to a more conservative strategy after a loss of greater than 20 per cent, compared with 70 per cent of women, notes the State Street

research.

Ms Evy Wee, head of financial planning and personal investing at DBS Bank, says that in the bank’s experience, investment activity among women tends to be lower than that among men.

Visits made to the investments page of DBS’ financial adviser, Your Financial GPS, also tend to be from men.

“This might not necessarily be driven by a lack of interest but time – an OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) global study has shown that women work nearly an hour longer than men every day when unpaid tasks are factored in,” Ms Wee notes.

“The upside is that many recent studies have shown that when women do invest, they do tend to make more in-

formed and calculated decisions, with male investors more inclined towards competitiveness.”

Mr Deepak Khanna, head of wealth development at HSBC Bank (Singapore), notes that less than a third of women in Singapore rate themselves as well informed on financial matters compared with almost half of the men surveyed in a 2018 HSBC study.

When it comes to household financial responsibility, women respondents (who have a partner) felt that they take a dominant role in day-to-day purchases like groceries while men take on greater responsibilities for investment decisions, including managing credit cards and paying household bills.

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Tips for both men and women

UNDERSTAND THE PRODUCT

Almost all investments have risks, and most investments are not principal-protected. Avoid products you don’t understand and which promise you high returns. Risks aren’t bad, but taking risks you don’t understand is to be avoided at all costs.

“Read widely, listen to market news regularly, like Money FM 89.3, ask your bankers to explain more, and verify with friends who are well versed in investments before you take the plunge,” says Mr Sam Phoen, co-founder of investment-management firm Wateram Capital.

USE FACTUAL INFORMATION

Many money-matter decisions are based on our behavioural biases. Most investors tend to

make investment decisions derived from individual feelings, perceptions, past experiences, information from peers, or just out of greed or fear.

One way to counter this, says Mr Deepak Khanna, head of wealth development at HSBC Bank (Singapore), is to try to distinguish opinions from facts.

“Take into consideration both positive and negative facts for securities or assets that you hold or plan to invest in. If you are basing your decision on an opinion – for example, a research report which contains investment views – make it a point to understand the assumptions behind the views.”

If the assumption doesn’t materialise – say an asset class view is based on a gross domestic product forecast that turned out to be off the mark – make it a point to review your portfolio and take timely action, he adds.

INVEST RIGHT FOR YOUR PERSONALITY

There is no one-size-fits-all investment portfolio. The key is to know what your investment personality is like and construct a portfolio that fits your personality, says Mr Phoen, who wrote the book Personality-Driven Portfolio: Invest Right For Your Style.

For example, if you are a long-term investor, please ignore “short-term hot tips” that you may receive, because they are just not suitable for your style and most times you won’t be quick enough to get out with a profit. Don’t adapt yourself to your investments; adapt your investments to suit you, he says.

DIVERSIFY YOUR INVESTMENTS AND REVIEW REGULARLY

Diversify your investments by allocating into a balanced portfolio of cash (including an emergency fund) and investments

that will allow you to achieve your goals (with a mix of equities and bonds), with a view on currencies to invest in.

“Since career income will be generated over only a limited number of years while expenses are a lifelong affair, it is important to save regularly and stay invested despite the markets’ ups and downs,” says Mr Khanna. “Review your portfolio at least once a year and rebalance it according to changes to your investment goals and risk tolerance.”

UNDERSTAND PROTECTION NEEDS

It is important to review the level of protection cover you need in order to be financially independent, especially on the death or disability of key income-earning family members. Protection coverage should also be sufficient to cover medical costs and long-term medical care, adds Mr Khanna.

Tips for men

INVESTING IS NOT A COMPETITION

Ms Evy Wee, head of financial planning and personal investing at DBS Bank, reminds men that investing is not a competition with yourself, your peers or the market. So when you are investing, it is important to construct portfolios that are positioned for the long term, with a clear risk-return objective in mind.

When crises unfold, and they inevitably will, such a portfolio will be well poised to withstand big swings in the market. More importantly, it will help you stay focused and avoid any over-reactions.

Adopt a “core” and “satellite” approach to portfolio building where the core portfolio provides stability.

AVOID FOLLOWING A TREND

Don’t buy a security or asset just because the price has rallied in the past, advises Mr Deepak Khanna, head of wealth development at HSBC Bank (Singapore). Instead, evaluate the suitability of the security or asset based on your own circumstances, especially its risk and reward trade-off.

AVOID OVER-CONCENTRATION

It is prudent to diversify your assets and ensure you have a good mix (and not necessarily an equal mix) of assets.

“Do not over-concentrate yourself in single securities or an asset class or invest in only those you are familiar with. A portfolio approach also helps to overcome loss aversion where an investor may be reluctant to invest in asset classes based on past experience. It is good to seek professional guidance for this process,” says Mr Khanna.

EQUATING TRADING TO PROFIT

Mr Sam Phoen, co-founder of investment-management firm Wateram Capital, notes that to a certain extent, profit from trading appears macho to men.

“Many also love to share their success stories in trading, while keeping mum about their losses,” he adds.

“Active trading may not mean higher profit, it depends on many things, no less your ability to beat the market. Temper your overconfidence, know that you might be wrong, don’t trade for the thrill, trade only when you have strong convictions.”

LONG TERM IS GOOD

The biggest advantage that long-term investing brings is compounding, says Mr Phoen.

“Instead of turning over your entire investment portfolio frequently to lock in profit, many times it might be more profitable to invest for the long term and let compounding work on making your money grow for you,” he adds.

By investing for the long term, you avoid tracking the market daily and reacting to panic buying or selling. Overtrading is expensive and should be avoided, notes Mr Khanna.

REMEMBER TO REVIEW

Regular review of your investment portfolio ensures two things.

First, it stops you from the urge to check your portfolio every now and then and bearing the brunt of overtrading.

And it allows you to review your investment objectives and the suitability of the underlying investments, including assumptions that were made based on certain opinions or conditions that may not have materialised over time, advises Mr Khanna.

Cost factor in private hospital Shield plans, riders

Insurers have rolled out more affordable riders that cover co-insurance and the deductible – subject to certain conditions



If you are Singaporean or a resident with a Central Provident Fund account, you will surely have hospitalisation insurance in the form of MediShield Life and most likely also a private Integrated Shield Plan (IP). It is estimated that nearly four million people were in the MediShield scheme as of 2016, and two-thirds have an IP. Yet even with the sizeable numbers, navigating the IP landscape is not as straightforward as it should be. This is due to a number of sobering trends. One is that premiums have escalated as insurers have increasingly found themselves grappling with mounting underwriting losses. Based on data by Wen Research for 2017, virtually all insurers in the scheme incurred underwriting losses. These were estimated at \$146 million in 2017 compared with less than \$100 million in 2016. For policyholders, this presents a discomfiting dilemma as the premium escalation is by no means even among the insurers. Some have hiked premiums more steeply, particularly for older ages. As a policyholder ages, it becomes less easy to switch insurers as he may have developed health conditions that may be excluded by a new insurer. Also, it is very difficult at the outset to have any visibility as to an insurer's portfolio of risk and the likelihood and extent of premium rises. More recently, the Health Insurance Task Force 2016 report indicated over-consumption of health services among those with IPs and riders as well as the possibility of overcharging among private hospitals. This is leading to changes in the premium structure for riders.

Until recently, you could buy riders to cover the deductible and co-insurance portions of a hospital bill. This allowed you to enjoy cover from the first dollar of costs. From April this year, insurers must launch new riders, where the co-payment benefit is 5 per cent (compared with the current 10 per cent), and there is a co-payment cap of \$3,000 per policy year. This means that new subscribers of riders will, from April, no longer be able to have coverage from the first dollar. This move is an effort to rein in over-consumption of health-care and hopefully also slow down the rise in premiums. The task force report also found that the hospital bills of people with full riders are 60 per cent higher than those without riders. As of 2016, about 1.1 million people had full riders. Those who already hold comprehensive riders can continue, but the writing on the wall is clear. They have to brace themselves for steep premium rises. But there is good news. One is that insurers have rolled out versions of riders where policyholders who agree to submit their cases to the insurer's panel of doctors or a pre-approval system can pay lower premiums. Aviva and Raffles Shield have rolled out new riders that comply with the 5 per cent co-payment requirement. Income expects to launch its rider in March and the rest in April. Aviva says its new riders are 20 per cent cheaper than the current comprehensive version; AXA indicates savings of between 28 per cent and 54 per cent. Here are some things to note if you are thinking of switching your IP or considering a rider.

PRIVATE HOSPITAL PLANS

The accompanying table of IP premiums is only for private hospital plans, which are the main culprit in over-consumption, and hence see the steepest escalation in premiums. The IP premiums exclude MediShield Life. But your actual total cost should include the premium for MediShield Life, which is also reflected in the table. Between 2016 and last year, some insurers raised premiums substantially. AIA's HealthShield Gold Max A premium for the 46 to 50 age band rose 36 per cent from \$570 in July 2018 to \$775. The 56 to 60 age band's premium rose 30 per cent from \$1,043 to \$1,355. Aviva raised premiums in 2016 for its private MyShield Plan 1 across a number of age bands and kept them steady in 2017. But last year, premiums rose between 6 per cent and 15 per cent for those aged 31 to 60. It will raise premiums again this year by between 8 per cent and 20 per cent. The 56 to 60 age band will see the sharpest rise – 15 per cent last year and 20 per cent this year. Underwriting losses in the IP port-



The Health Insurance Task Force 2016 report indicated over-consumption of health services among those with Integrated Shield Plans and riders as well as the possibility of overcharging among private hospitals. This is leading to changes in the premium structure for riders. ST FILE PHOTO

Integrated Shield's cost challenge

IP annual premiums for select age groups (private hospital) \$

Insurer plan	46-50	51-55	56-60
AIA HealthShield Gold Max A	775	1,061	1,355
Aviva MyShield Plan 1	924	1,166	1,483
AXA Shield Plan A	600	818	998
GE Supreme Health P Plus	459	752	878
Enhanced IncomeShield (Preferred)	766	888	1,162
PruShield Premier	581-600	870-1,002	1,041-1,159
Raffles Shield	632	948	1,057
*MediShield Life (basic required policy)	435	630	630

RIDER PREMIUMS (DEDUCTIBLE + CO-INSURANCE)

Insurer plan	46-50	51-55	56-60
AIA Max Essential A	1,413	1,741	2,398
Aviva MyHealthPlus C (Plan 1)	1,422	1,645	2,241
AXA Basic Care + General Care Plan A	821	1,017	1,352
GE Private Plan (Platinum)	726	1,088	1,482
Enhanced IncomeShield (Preferred) Plus	980	1,587	2,186
PruExtra Premier	842	1,070-1,213	1,500-1,734

INSURER IP UNDERWRITING LOSSES (\$ MILLION)

	2017	2016
AIA	40	29
Aviva	25	7
AXA	7	5
Great Eastern	39	12
NTUC Income	20	27
Prudential	15	19
Total loss	146	99

Source: THE BUSINESS TIMES, WEN RESEARCH SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

folio play a part in the premium trend but do not tell the whole story. Based on Wen Research's compilation, AIA incurred an underwriting loss of \$40 million in 2017 and \$29 million in 2016. Aviva's loss came to \$25 million and \$7 million, respectively. Yet insurers like Great Eastern Life managed relatively modest premium adjustments. Between 2015 and last year, GE said it reviewed premiums once, in 2017. The premium for the private Supreme Health P Plus plan rose from \$717 to \$752 in 2017-2018 for the 51 to 55 age band. The premium for the 56 to 60 age band rose from \$837 to \$878. GE said: "In 2017, when we revised our premiums for our suite of IP plans and riders, we adopted a moderate approach combined

with educating the public not to overconsume." GE's underwriting loss deepened from \$12 million in 2016 to \$39 million in 2017. RIDERS: HOW MUCH DO YOU REALLY NEED? Riders that cover both the deductible and co-payment portions of costs sound desirable but the big question is affordability. The premium escalation in the rider segment by far exceeds the trend in the base plans. In some older age bands, the premium for a comprehensive rider alone exceeds the total cost of the base plan (MediShield Life plus IP). Since the rider covers just a portion of the total hospital bill, the cost seems disproportionately high. So if you hold a comprehen-

sive rider, you really need to think hard about your needs and whether the premium is affordable at older ages when you may cease to earn an income. Riders are paid in cash. For example, the premiums for AIA's Max Essential A rider for private hospital plan rose by 58 per cent across a number of age groups. The 51 to 55 age band paid \$1,741 from July 2018, compared with \$1,101 previously. The cost of GE's Platinum rider for its private plan rose between 30 per cent and 35 per cent for the 41 to 60 age group. Income raised the premiums for its Enhanced IncomeShield (Preferred) Plus rider by as much as 54 per cent for some age groups. They rise further this year, by up to 66 per cent for the 51 to 55 age band. Aviva raised its MyHealthPlus C Plan 1 rider by between 26 per cent and 36 per cent for the 31 to 60 age group last year. This year, the premiums will rise by – brace yourself – 74 per cent to 80 per cent. There are some enhancements: This year, there is an overseas treatment benefit for six covered illnesses, inclusive of travel and accommodation costs, for instance. But you need to take a hard look at the premiums. At older ages, the rider premium could exceed your main plan. Aviva's MyShield Plan 1 will cost \$1,483 for the 56 to 60 age group, for instance. Add in MediShield Life's premium of \$630 and the total premium is \$2,113. The cost of the comprehensive rider is \$2,241. It is the same story for Income's Enhanced IncomeShield (Preferred), where the total premium, including MediShield Life, is \$1,792 for the 56 to 60 age group. The comprehensive rider premium is \$2,186. For AIA, the private plan costs \$1,985 for the same age group, including MediShield Life. The Max Essential A rider costs \$2,398. MORE AFFORDABLE RIDERS – WITH CONDITIONS Insurers have launched more affordable riders that cover the co-insurance and the deductible – subject to certain conditions. AIA, for instance, has a Max Essential Saver A rider for its private plan. This will cover the co-insurance portion. But the deductible is covered only if customers seek treatment through AIA's "quality healthcare partners" comprising over 180 private medical specialists, or in government/restructured

hospitals. The premium for the 56 to 60 age band is \$729 compared with the cost of the full rider at \$2,398. Great Eastern has a Total Health Platinum Select rider, where customers access private hospitals through GE's panel of doctors, using a complimentary call-in service called Health Connect, which helps facilitate pre-authorisation. The premium for the 56 to 60 age band for Platinum (comprehensive) is \$1,482, against \$570 for Platinum Select. Prudential has a system of "claims-based pricing" for its rider, PRUextra Premier, where premiums are determined by whether claims have been made. It did not raise rider premiums last year. Ms Agnes Choy, Prudential's head of group business and medical products, says: "We believe a claims-based approach is fair because customers who claim less and stay healthy are rewarded with lower premiums." Over 80 per cent of its customers get a 20 per cent discount on renewal premiums for their rider.

NEW BREED OF RIDERS: 5 PER CENT CO-PAY

Aviva is one of the first to launch the new version of riders as required by the Health Ministry. The new rider, called MyHealthPlus, has two options. The one that comes close to a comprehensive rider is Option C-II, where there is a deductible benefit. AXA will launch its AXA Enhanced Care in April. The structure is in line with what is mandated by the ministry. AXA has thrown in up to 365 days of post-hospitalisation cover. Premiums are expected to be 28 per cent to 54 per cent cheaper than existing riders. AIA will launch the AIA Max Vital-Health rider to replace existing riders in April. Income expects to launch two new riders – Deluxe Care and Classic Care – in March. The Deluxe Care rider is subject to 5 per cent co-payment on all benefits; the Classic Care rider has a 10 per cent co-payment. The cap on co-payment of \$3,000 per year applies if the treatments are under the IncomeShield private specialist panel. Premiums of Deluxe Care rider are expected to be 5 per cent to 18 per cent lower than the Plus rider.

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The Year of the Pig could be positive – or otherwise. The last two cycles of the Chinese zodiac, 1995 and 2007, turned out quite differently. December 1994 saw the rise of the Internet, the beginning of the dot.com boom and one of the most pronounced bull markets in history. In the spring of 2007, the global financial crisis started unfolding. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

The Year of the Pig: Bull, bear or balanced?

2019 will provide both volatility and opportunity. What do you plan to do about it?



Puneet Chaddha

In Asia, pigs are seen as a symbol of prosperity. Based on this, one would naturally think that 2019 should

bring with it a positive outlook.

Interestingly, the last two Years of the Pig – 1995 and 2007 – unfolded very differently.

December 1994 saw the rise of the Internet, the beginning of the dot.com boom and one of the most pronounced bull markets in history. In contrast, no one needs reminding of the global financial crisis, which started unfolding in the spring of 2007 and resulted in the worst bear market investors had seen in decades.

So it doesn't look like history is anything to go by in this case. Being in the Year of the Pig could be positive, or not. To me, 2019 will likely be a volatile year, but the good news is – volatility means opportunity.

A LOOK BACK AT 2018

After a relatively strong 2017 characterised by synchronised global growth, 2018 was a rough ride and hard to anticipate.

It started with markets reacting to US-China trade tensions, headlines like tech juggernaut Apple hitting US\$1 trillion (\$\$1.36 trillion) in market cap (a first for any US corporation), and yet – like most equities – it tumbled a bit. That's how markets work – they ebb and flow.

Take the S&P index, which tracks the largest 500 US corporations. It grew 22 per cent in 2017 but lost 4 per cent last year.

VOLATILE TIMES AHEAD

With macro and political uncertain-

ties surrounding broader trade protectionism and Brexit lingering, volatility is likely to be a constant companion this year.

Despite these challenges, fundamental indicators look solid and recession risk is modest in our view. However, we are unlikely to see high single-digit to double-digit growth again as China, the world's second-largest economy, is transitioning from high growth to quality growth.

CHINA MARKET OUTLOOK IN THE YEAR OF THE PIG

China is undergoing a transition from investment to consumption-led growth. This means increased domestic demand is expected to con-

As far as Asian investors are concerned, the diversification of investments remains crucial. More than ever, investors stand to gain by broadening their horizons beyond domestic markets or single-asset classes.

tinue fuelling its economic engine.

The government has also demonstrated continued opening up of capital markets like the expansion of onshore equity and bond market. This sets the stage for foreign investors to increasingly tap the Chinese economy.

Our economic outlook for China remains positive this year. Government policies to stimulate growth look robust, with greater focus on stabilising the economy. An increased emphasis on more quality, sustainable growth bodes well for long-term investors.

BULL, BEAR OR BALANCED?

People born in the Year of the Pig are considered to be realistic. So following a realistic approach, valuations of Chinese assets seem very reasonable now compared with where they were a year ago.

Now, if you wish to tap the China growth opportunity but are cautious of volatility, you could consider a diversified multi-asset approach that is combining Chinese equities and bonds in a single portfolio. This way, you could capture the full opportunity set that China offers while balancing growth and stability.

To me it is not that much about being bullish or bearish. It is about accessing China in a way that suits your risk appetite. If you wish to have a smoother investment ride, then a balanced approach can help you achieve this and, as a result, you could enhance your risk-adjusted returns.

PLAN, PLAN AND THEN PLAN SOME MORE

Regardless of where or what you intend to invest in, at the end of the day, the most important thing is to have an investment plan.

Investors who identify the right strategy for their circumstances and take steps to protect their portfolios from short-term bouts of volatility will stand a better chance of coming out as winners this year.

As far as Asian investors are concerned, the diversification of investments remains crucial. More than ever, investors stand to gain by broadening their horizons beyond domestic markets or single-asset classes. And remember, don't just focus on the returns, but also consider the risk that you take to get those returns.

I hope the Year of the Pig brings you prosperity and happiness.

• The writer is chief executive and head of South-east Asia, HSBC Global Asset Management.

Chips falling into place for an Asian equity rally

Steve Brice

Emerging markets (EMs) are off to a flying start this year. Latin American and Eastern European stock markets are up more than 10 per cent year-to-date, significantly outperforming their US and other developed market counterparts. However, Asian markets have lagged behind. There are increasing signs that the disconnect between Asia and other EMs may not last much longer.

We believe there are three major signposts to watch for an Asian equity market catch-up rally, some of which have started to flash green.

The primary building block for a recovery in EM assets following last year's reversals was put in place by the US Federal Reserve at its December 2018 meeting.

After pushing through 2 percentage points in interest rate hikes over a span of two years, the US central bank acknowledged that US financial conditions had tightened to a point where it could afford to be "patient" and examine the impact on domestic economic activity.

A "patient" Fed is good news for EMs and Asia because it halts the once-growing divergence in monetary policy between the Fed and the rest of the world.

As US policy resynchronises with the world, albeit temporarily, the US dollar is likely to reverse some of last year's gains. A softer US dollar in turn enables EM financial conditions to loosen, while encouraging institutional investors to shift funds to EM assets.

We see early indications of this phenomenon – EM equity markets have so far seen the strongest fund inflows since the first two months of last year. A prolonged Fed pause on rates, which is likely to hold well into the middle of the year given contained US inflation, could accelerate the flows and the EM equity rally.

Asia is likely to particularly benefit from the renewed inflows if a second condition is met – namely, that China steps up support for its economy. Over the past few months, Beijing has not only shelved its plans to deleverage the economy and tighten environmental and other regulations (at least for now), but also appears to have done a U-turn in policy and shifted focus to supporting growth.

In gradual but increasingly orchestrated steps, China's policymakers have cut bank reserve requirements, eased credit support for small and medium-sized companies, cut personal and corporate tax rates and eased rules for local governments to issue more bonds to finance infrastructure projects, while fast-tracking their regulatory approvals. While these measures are milder than the large investment-driven stimulus seen after the 2008 financial crisis, we believe they are likely to help stabilise growth in the coming months and aid a recovery by the second half of the year.

China's coordinated, growth-boosting measures are a key reason why China is our preferred equity market within Asia. Moreover, China's onshore equity market is trading below its long-term aver-



Tesla cars ready to be loaded onto vessels destined for China ahead of March 1, when a trade war truce between Beijing and Washington is set to end. There are hopeful signs for a resolution in the dispute, says the writer. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

age valuation of 11 times 12-month forward earnings and is close to historical lows, making it attractive within Asia. Meanwhile, Asia ex-Japan valuations of around 12 times 12-month forward earnings are also below their long-term average.

There is also an important distinction between China's current policy measures and those in the past that has investment implications – the latest stimulus measures are mostly directed at boosting domes-

tic consumption, whereas the investment-driven stimulus measures of the past benefited global suppliers of key commodities, including several non-Asia EMs.

Given this, the latest policies make China's domestic-focused consumer discretionary sector particularly attractive for investors.

Lastly, any resolution, or even a thaw, in the ongoing US-China trade disputes would be a crucial building block for a sustainable

rally in Asian equities this year. There are hopeful signs here. For one thing, there seems to be growing understanding in the US administration that a prolonged trade war might be damaging for the US economy itself.

The slowdown in US growth in the fourth quarter of last year can be partly ascribed to the spillover of the global growth slowdown, sagging business confidence and tighter financial conditions. The US

equity market volatility last December reinforced this concern.

Hence, we see the growing willingness between the two sides to avoid further escalation of the tit-for-tat tariff war and to reach a negotiated settlement. We believe one way forward would be for the two sides to separate their disputes over intellectual property from the broader trade imbalances. China has already pledged to boost imports of aircraft, automobiles, energy and agricultural commodities from the US in the coming years. These steps should help narrow the US-China trade gap over the coming decade.

For sure, the challenges against a sustained revival in risk assets in EMs remain non-trivial. The global economic cycle is mature; the Fed may yet resume rate hikes as domestic labour markets continue to tighten. China's high debt levels mean that it faces structural impediments against significantly pump-priming growth, and the intellectual property disputes between China and the US may become more entrenched.

These risks justify a broadly diversified approach to investing, with exposure to stocks, government and corporate bonds, gold and other alternative assets. Nevertheless, we see the stage being set for Asian equities to catch up with other EMs and outperform global equities over the coming year.

• The writer is chief investment strategist at Standard Chartered Private Bank.

Why financing the right companies helps investors create value in society

They should transition portfolios to ensure returns match a more sustainable economy



Joep Huntjens

Interest in environmental, social and governance (ESG) investing keeps growing. Across the board, we are now seeing more asset managers and investors giving it greater attention.

There are many reasons for this. One is the growing awareness among governments and companies of the impact of climate change and the need to act upon it. Another is the rise of social media and socially minded millennials, helping to keep companies in check.

Appraising ESG risks has also become more disciplined and explicit due to an increase in data sources that help assess these risks.

Firms with a commitment to doing business ethically, responsibly and sustainably are more likely to withstand downturns and thrive due to their long-term focus. Such an approach is even more important in developing Asia, where governance structures tend to be more lax than their developed-market counterparts.

Increasingly, issuers are becoming more aware that investors demand a premium for investments in companies which lack transparent ESG policies, as reputational issues arising from unethical practices can inflict financial damage. So, implementation of proper ESG policies can help issuers to reduce

their cost of funding and encourage broader adoption.

In Singapore, for instance, a large number of companies are listed or are part of a larger governance group. According to a 2018 research report by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, corporate reporting provisions on sustainability aspects among firms headquartered in Singapore have quadrupled since 1990, from fewer than five to 21.

Provisions and requirements, issued by various parties, such as the National Environment Agency, the Singapore Exchange and Singapore's national water agency PUB, promote transparency of firms' ESG policies. Hence, ESG profiles in developed markets such as Singapore are more mature than those in developing markets, which still face governance issues.

At the same time, asset managers have greater incentive to robustly screen companies for governance issues in developing markets. Governance structures in such markets need more time to mature, so greater due diligence is needed to weed out firms that could have reputational issues in the future, and hence an increased risk profile.

Finding companies that score positively on ESG aspects, adding value to our world while capturing tomorrow's financial growth drivers, is key and should be embedded in the investment process across all strategies, rather than a select few branded as ESG. More importantly, incorporating ESG in investments should be more than just a feel-good factor. Negative ESG events can have a significant impact on fixed-income returns, so including ESG in traditional fundamental analysis is essential.



Smoke rising from a factory chimney in Amritsar, India. Actively engaging firms to adopt a sustainable and ethical business can promote more stable investment returns in the long run, says the writer. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Assessment of companies can be done by examining external sources, identifying a firm's policies and practices, applying sector-specific weights for ESG factors, and engagement by analysts via meetings, conference calls and formal dialogues.

This is where information from external data providers is valuable. But beyond external sources of data, what adds greater value to the investment process are the insights and skills of experienced credit analysts and dedicated ESG experts, such as NN Investment Partners' Responsible Investment team based in The Hague, who can perform a thorough in-house analysis.

FOCUS ON INCLUSION ENHANCES RETURN

Responsible investing often starts

with a process to weed out companies that fail to meet a set of ESG criteria. But while filtering out such companies is a good first step in building a sustainable portfolio, investors can do more by focusing not just on exclusion but on inclusion.

Inclusion means the integration of ESG factors in traditional financial analysis to assess ESG risks and opportunities.

Investment managers can actively engage firms they invest in by encouraging the company to adopt sustainable governance structures, improve their environmental footprint and implement ethical business practices.

Actively engaging firms to adopt a sustainable and ethical business can promote more stable investment returns in the long run and re-

duce the cost of funding for firms.

At the same time, investors can have the peace of mind that their assets are being deployed responsibly.

Now more than ever, investors should be transitioning their fixed-income portfolios to match an investment universe in which financial returns go hand in hand with a more sustainable economy and prosperous society.

RISE OF THE GREEN BOND MARKET

Another trend is the increasing attention investors are paying to how the proceeds of a bond are being used and what their impact is on environmental and social aspects. This is where green, social and sustainability bonds come in.

Among these, the largest market is for green bonds, which specifi-

cally target positive, measurable environmental impact.

The green bond market is growing rapidly, both in corporates as well as sovereigns, allowing for more investment opportunities. However, it is still vital to research and assess both the bond and the issuer on their merits, not just relying on external data or labels, to select the right investment that really makes a positive contribution.

The market for green bonds has grown considerably over the past 10 years, reaching about €300 billion (\$460 billion) as of last year, Bloomberg data showed, with China being the largest issuer globally.

The market size means green bonds have sufficient liquidity and diversity for investors.

This growth is being fuelled by various factors: A strong political drive to decarbonise economies and strengthen legislation accordingly; improving standards and guidelines from governments and businesses; as well as greater demand from investors who want to be more active in influencing how firms invest their proceeds from fund raising.

As businesses and governments work to meet their commitments towards global agreements such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris climate accord, the demand for socially and environmentally conscious investment products is likely to grow.

The investible universe is large and diverse enough to maintain credit quality, duration and diversification.

Fixed-income investors can move from traditional fixed-income investing towards a more sustainable portfolio while maintaining the same portfolio characteristics and targeting the same financial returns.

• The writer is head of Asian Fixed Income at NN Investment Partners.

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Invest

Me&MyMoney

Entrepreneur and risk taker at the top of his game

His S'pore-based venture capital fund aims to generate high returns for investors in gaming business



Lorna Tan

Invest Editor

Entrepreneur Henric Suuronen has come a long way from his humble background growing up in a single-parent household in Finland with two older brothers.

His father was a dentist who died when Mr Suuronen was eight, and his now-retired mother worked for a ferry company.

"We were always tight financially and I learnt that I can determine what my financial future looks like. I studied hard, always did my homework, and worked dozens of odd jobs including picking mushrooms in the forest to sell to restaurants," he recalls.

Mr Suuronen, 38, is the founding partner and chief executive of Play Ventures, a Singapore-based venture capital fund set up in August last year to invest in the online gaming industry. "We have committed capital of about US\$30 million (S\$41 million) to start with, and our investors are some of the best gaming companies and entrepreneurs in the world," he says.

"We are happy about the support and trust they have in our ability to find the best start-ups, help them create value and generate returns."

Play Ventures has made five investments from the fund so far, at about US\$500,000 each.

Mr Suuronen, who is single, has two master's degrees from Abo Akademi University in Finland – one in business in 2006 and the other in software engineering, a year later.

Before setting up Play Ventures, he worked at Nokia in Finland as a project manager for multimedia experiences, as well as for companies in Spain, Germany and Singapore, first as president and co-founder of Nonstop Games and senior creative director at gaming firm King, the developer behind hit mobile game Candy Crush.

Q What's the next stage of growth for your businesses?

A We are well positioned to deliver world-class returns to our investors. Few people realise that the gaming business is worth more than movies and music combined.

It will generate close to US\$140 billion this year, and there are only a handful of funds worldwide that work with early-stage gaming companies. In addition, our fund is the only gaming fund that does deals across multiple continents – Europe, Asia and the United States.

Q What's in your portfolio?

A In my personal investment portfolio, I have a very wide range of assets, including stocks in Europe, the US and Singapore, real estate in

Berlin and Barcelona, angel investments in 14 private companies, venture capital fund investments and a few stock funds, including the Aggregate Value Fund, which I started investing in in 2014.

I have been so satisfied with the returns of Aggregate Value Fund that I continued to increase my investment, for capital preservation given the above-market returns it has generated for my portfolio.

I have been able to generate superb returns through my own start-up angel investing. Although I invested only about 20 per cent of my capital in private companies, those holdings now represent about 85 per cent to 90 per cent of my total net worth.

If I exclude my private company portfolio, I would say about 30 per cent is in direct stocks, 20 per cent in real estate, 20 per cent in cash, and 30 per cent in different funds.

My private company investment returns are over 10 times and skew my portfolio returns heavily. My direct stock investing returns have been varied.

Over the past 10 years, my European stock picks have grown at an average of 10 per cent year on year, with dividends. My US market stock trading has been less successful, delivering 2 per cent to 8 per cent yearly returns. In Singapore, I have been lucky with a few stock picks like DBS Bank, which I got into when it was very low at \$14 a couple of years ago.

The Aggregate Value Fund managed by Aggregate Asset Management in Singapore gives me the exposure to Asia equities with a return of 8 per cent to 10 per cent.

Q What are your immediate investment plans?

A I am investing heavily in my own fund Play Ventures. The gaming market is an asset class that I understand well and my 15 years of industry experience and networks give me a strong advantage.

I also just invested in a US-based fund investing in Y Combinator start-ups.

Q How did you get interested in investing?

A When I turned 20, in 2000, I started buying stocks. It was terrible timing, with the dot.com bubble bursting, and I lost about 70 per cent of my life savings! But I refused to give up and used the loss as a lesson, which has allowed me to make some great stock investments later.

For example, I invested in an insurance company in the Nordics in 2002, and the omnipresent lift and escalator company Kone. They are still some of the best investments I have ever made.

Q Describe your investing strategy.

A My overall strategy is to diversify across asset classes and also geography. As I am a risk taker by nature, I might make a big bet when I feel that I understand the investment more than other investors. This is especially true in gaming companies where my years of gaming industry experience have given me a definitive advantage.

Since my private investments are illiquid by nature and do not usually pay dividends, I balance this with stocks that pay 4 per cent to 5 per cent or more in dividends to make

clinics and hospitals. An AMD must be made through a doctor.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

An AMD gives us the power to determine, when we are well and of sound mind, what our treatment should be when we can no longer decide for ourselves.

Modern medical technology can prolong life in the final stages of a

terminal illness. However, it cannot stop the dying process.

In such situations, further intervention would be medically ineffective and a decision has to be made whether to withdraw such futile actions.

Some terminally ill people who are unable to express their wishes at that time may want to be spared further suffering and be allowed to

die in peace and with dignity.

For instance, most patients want to die at home, spending their last moments with their loved ones, instead of being hooked to machines in an intensive care unit (ICU).

But in the absence of an AMD and when the patient is too ill to express his wishes, doctors can do little but follow the distraught family's orders. Of course, ICU treatment is al-

ways recommended when the patient has a reasonable hope of recovering to a painless and lucid state.

IF YOU WANT TO USE THE TERM, JUST SAY:

"My doctor recommended the AMD as a way to avoid a prolonged and painful death."

Lorna Tan



Mr Henric Suuronen says the gaming business is worth more than movies and music combined, adding that Play Ventures, a Singapore-based venture capital fund, is the only gaming fund that does deals across multiple continents – Europe, Asia and the US. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

Worst and best bets

Q What has been your biggest investing mistake?

A I tend to lose money when I invest opportunistically in stocks without really understanding the dynamics of the industry. Some of my biggest losses include buying Seadrill – an offshore oil rigging company – when the price of oil started sliding a few years ago.

I bought when the stock had dropped 60 per cent from its all-time high price but, of course, it continued to drop and I lost about 70 per cent on it. I think the absolute value was about US\$30,000. I have since stopped opportunistic stock trading as it just makes me lose money and sleep.

Q And your best investment?

A My best investment was Huuuge – a private mobile gaming company. I invested in the company at US\$8 million valuation and now it is worth more than US\$500 million (S\$680 million).

I have generated returns over 40 times on that investment even after dilution from subsequent financing rounds. I currently serve on the board as well.

I found the company and deal since I had previously worked with the founder of Huuuge. We knew each other well and liked working with each other, so when the company needed money I was quick to invest.

Lorna Tan

sure I get some cash flow.

For capital preservation and retirement, I turn to value investing to ensure long-term gains and stable market returns and give my portfolio Asian market exposure.

Q What else is in your financial plan?

A I will cut down on buying stocks directly and invest more in private companies and funds. I am also looking to buy more real estate in cities

such as Berlin, Barcelona and Singapore. I'm planning to invest in property in Singapore once I have my permanent residency.

Q How are you planning for retirement?

A I have a special "buy-and-hold-forever" portfolio of high-dividend-yield stocks that now cover almost all my living expenses. That portfolio and the Aggregate Value

Fund will form the backbone of my retirement income.

When I was younger, I wanted to retire at the age of 35. When I sold the company I founded (Nonstop Games), I tried "retiring" but got bored in just three weeks.

Now, I think I will never fully retire. But rather than work crazy hours, I'll work a healthy amount of time so that I can have a good balance between work, family and free time.

Q Home is now...

A I lease a 1,000 sq ft, two-bedroom condo with a friend in Robertson Quay. I love the area and have been there for about five years.

Q I drive...

A I don't have a car and have never owned one. I am a big supporter of being green, so I prefer cycling or using the public transport in Singapore. In the future, I might buy an electric car to get my kids to school or to football practice.

lornatan@sph.com.sg

• Join Invest editor Lorna Tan for her talk on retirement planning via CPF at Agape Village, multi-purpose hall, level 1, 7A Lorong 8 Toa Payoh, from 7.30pm on Friday. To register, please e-mail agapevillage@caritas-singapore.org or call 6801-7400.

FinancialQuotient

What is an AMD?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

An Advance Medical Directive (AMD) is a legal document a person signs to indicate that in case he becomes terminally ill and unconscious, he does not want any extraordinary life-sustaining treatment.

Anyone who is at least 21 years old and not mentally disordered can make an AMD. The forms are available from medical clinics, poly-

Life

C | A-Z of Singapore legends
C6-8



Our hawker centres provide a wonderful snapshot of who we are as a country. After all, these centres are where various cuisines across our different ethnic groups culminate in one sweet spot.

Serene Lim, 41

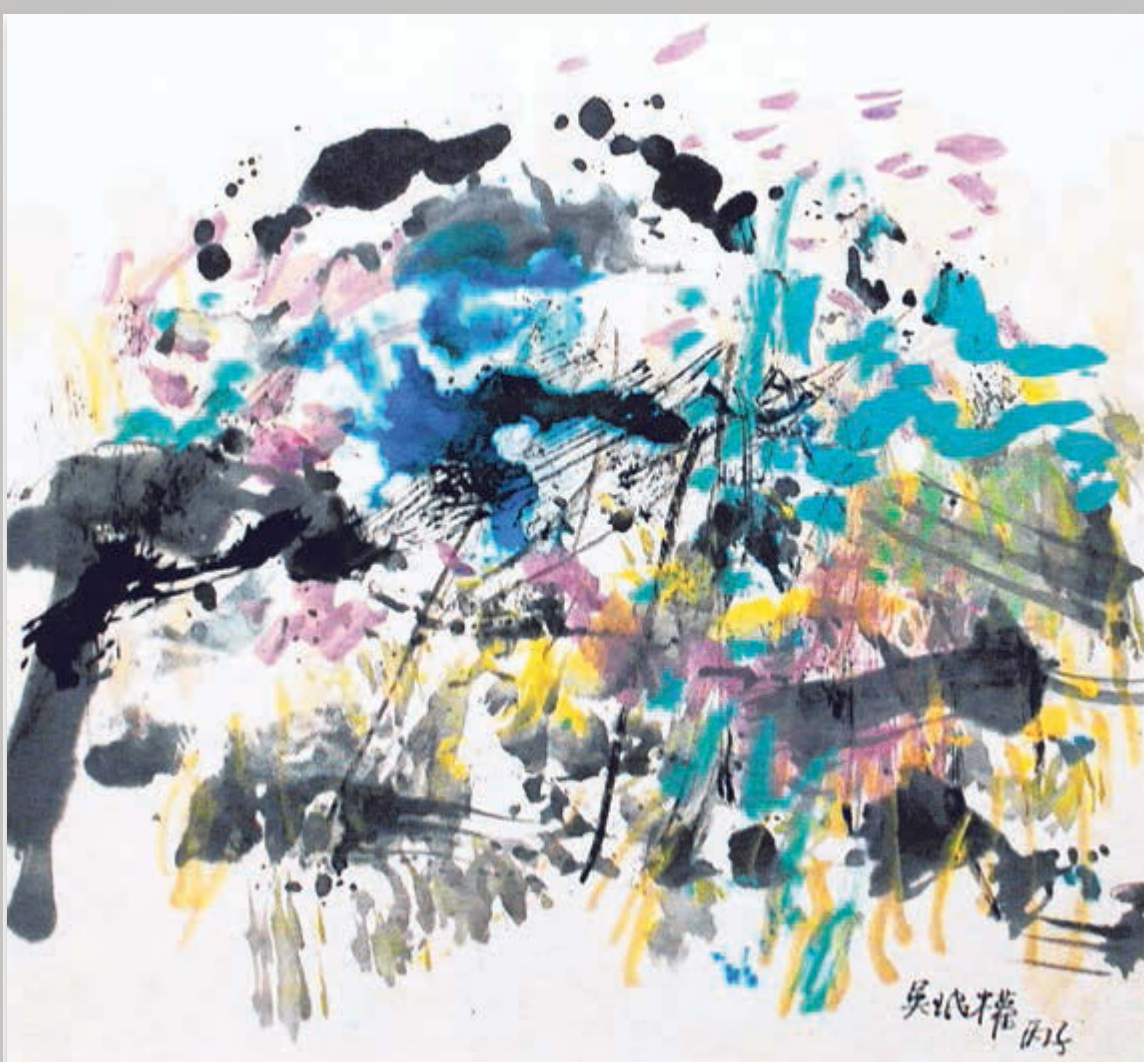
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Going, . going, gone



The biggest art collectors' event here, Art Stage Singapore, may be headed for liquidation, but there is no better time to collect the works of local masters. Snag this painting by Singapore legend Goh Beng Kwan for \$4,000. [Ong Sor Fern](#) reports. C2-4



• [Paige Parker: Why I moved my family to Singapore](#) C9 • [White beehoon: Unsung Singaporean legend?](#) C19

DESIGN: SALLY LAM PHOTOS: GOH BENG KWAN, FILE PHOTOS

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Handpicked Wines presents An Evening of British Hainanese Cuisine with Violet Oon Singapore
1 March 2019 | 7pm | Violet Oon Singapore
\$119.20++ (Citi Cards) | \$149.00++ (Other payment modes)
Each diner will be presented with a bottle of Handpicked Regional Selection Rosé worth \$48.

The Flavours of Asia Culinary Workshop
2 March 2019 | 10am, 12pm, 2pm and 4pm | ToTT Cooking Studio
\$20.00++ (Citi Cards) | \$25.00++ (Other payment modes)

An Evening at PeraMakan with Veramonte Wines
5 March 2019 | 7pm | PeraMakan
\$94.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$118.00++ (Other payment modes)

INFINITI presents A World of Spice with Jack Daniel's and Woodford Reserve Whiskies at The Song of India
6 March 2019 | 7pm | The Song of India
\$86.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$108.00++ (Other payment modes)

Lianhe Zaobao presents The GlenDronach Dinner at Teochew Restaurant Huat Kee
7 March 2019 | 7pm | Teochew Restaurant Huat Kee
\$216.00++ (Citi Cards) | \$270.00++ (Other payment modes)
Each diner will be presented with a bottle of The GlenDronach Original 12 Years worth \$138.

The Straits Times presents a Celebration Dinner at Spring Court with Handpicked Wines
12 March 2019 | 7pm | Spring Court
\$170.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$213.00++ (Other payment modes)
Each diner will be presented with a bottle of Handpicked Regional Selection Pinot Noir worth \$48.

Hashida Sushi presents an Omakase Evening with Premium Gins, Ferdinand's, The London No.1 and MOM
13 March 2019 | 7pm | Hashida Sushi Singapore
\$458.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$573.00++ (Other payment modes)
Each diner will be presented with a bottle of Ferdinand's Saar Dry Gin worth \$99.

The Signature Creations of BLOSSOM with Handpicked Wines
14 March 2019 | 7pm | BLOSSOM
\$198.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$248.00++ (Other payment modes)

A Taste of Exquisite Malay Cuisine with Aziza
19 March 2019 | 7pm | Grand Hyatt Singapore
\$94.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$118.00++ (Other payment modes)

Award-winning Author Bryan Koh presents "0451 MB: An Evening of Food from His Books", Accompanied by Woodford Reserve Cocktails
21 March 2019 | 7pm | Auntie's Wok and Steam | Andaz Singapore
\$102.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$128.00++ (Other payment modes)

A Late Night Supper at JB Ah Meng with Veramonte Wines
22 March 2019 | 10pm | JB Ah Meng
\$46.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$58.00++ (Other payment modes)

Majestic Restaurant presents a High Aged Expression Whisky Dinner with The GlenDronach, Glenglassaugh and BenRiach
26 March 2019, Tuesday | 7pm | Majestic Restaurant
\$142.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$178.00++ (Other payment modes)

A Private Dining Experience with Tinoq and Handpicked Wines
27 March 2019 | 7pm | Private dining
\$142.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$178.00++ (Other payment modes)

An Evening of Cantonese Treasures at Peach Blossoms with Orin Swift
28 March 2019 | 7pm | Peach Blossoms
\$150.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$188.00++ (Other payment modes)

The Signature Cuisine of Famous Treasure with The GlenDronach and BenRiach
3 April 2019 | 7pm | Famous Treasure
\$238.40++ (Citi Cards) | \$298.00++ (Other payment modes)
Each diner will be presented with a Limited Edition bottle of The GlenDronach Cask Strength Batch 7 worth \$168.

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The art of buying art

Singapore Legends

It is possible to collect artworks by renowned Singapore artists without busting the bank. Here's how



Ong Sor Fern
Senior Culture Correspondent

Few have the chance to own artworks by pioneer Singapore artists such as Chen Wen Hsi and Cheong Soo Pieng, as prices have hit the high six figures in the past couple of decades.

But there are second-generation artists as well as a whole range of active Cultural Medallion award recipients whose works are still affordable.

An interested buyer can even get pieces priced under \$5,000 if they look hard enough. Extend that limit to the Affordable Art Fair's top tier of \$15,000, and a lot more options open up.

Potter Iskandar Jallil, for example, has what gallerist Patricia Liang calls "bread and butter works" for sale for less than \$5,000. These are smaller pieces which are less complex technically, but still collectible.

"He wants to keep his works affordable for Singaporeans," Ms Liang says of the 79-year-old artist, whose larger works can go on the block for more than \$10,000.

There is a catch. Iskandar's output is slowing and demand is high.

Ms Liang, 51, who organised his last exhibition at the Japan Creative Center in November, used a ballot system as there were more buyers than pieces available. In the end, 10 buyers went home empty-handed while 66 works found new homes.

Considering that some young Singapore artists are pricing their works at \$5,000 and above, getting a work by an older artist who has been in the business for 30 years at the same price range can be considered a bargain.

Mr Khairuddin Hori, 44, of Chan + Hori Contemporary, a gallery at Gillman Barracks, estimates that about 15 per cent of his stock is priced under \$5,000.

He says: "Works by artists from Singapore are generally priced much higher than those of their peers from the region though, mainly due to the high cost of living and operating here."

Singaporeans have become more affluent but gallerists here note that they still seem hesitant when it comes to buying art, especially works by Singapore artists.

Artcommune Gallery's Mr Ho Sou Ping, 47, observes: "Singaporeans are scared of buying art. But it is fun. There are parties and events to go to. They don't have to be scared."

Last week, the biggest art collectors' event here, Art Stage Singapore, was placed under provisional liquidation after its sudden cancellation on Jan 16, just nine days before its public opening.

While that may be the end of Art Stage Singapore, there are other avenues for buyers to pick up quality art, including those by Singapore masters.

Here is a step-by-step guide.

sorfern@sph.com.sg



Artist Thomas Yeo at his home with his favourite artwork made in 1967 which is not for sale. ST PHOTO: SAHIBA CHAUDHARY

1 LOOK AT ART

The first step is simply to go to galleries and look at as much art as possible.

There are plenty of galleries in Singapore which offer a range of works from established and upcoming Singapore artists. There are always exhibitions and shows.

You can then figure out what you like and what you do not like.

Ms Ning Chong, 34, who runs The Culture Story together with her father Mr Chong Huai Seng, 68, at Thyne Hong Centre, says: "The onus falls on the individual to make the effort to learn. You have to look and figure out what you like."

On a more practical note, learn about the artist's resume, where he was educated, when and where he has exhibited his works, and whether they are collected by national institutions.

These are good gauges for the artist's technical accomplishments as well as his standing in the art world.

Mr Khairuddin says such homework is even more important for those who buy purely for the sake of investment.

"For decisions that are tied exclusively to investment, with the intent of reselling in secondary markets, buyers need to be precise in their research and pick artists that are 'confirmed', with consistent presence and a good track record in auctions."

Artcommune Gallery's Mr Ho adds half in jest: "If you cannot afford a big piece, buy a small one and add a bigger frame."

Unframed works can cost less, but be mindful that proper framing also helps protect the piece. This is especially important in Singapore's humid weather.

Ms Chong says she is mindful of buyer considerations when she builds a show.

"We always make sure there's work that spans a range of price points, but without compromising the quality of the show."

A gallery's space is limited, so what is displayed is only the tip of the iceberg.

2 LOOK FOR ALTERNATIVE MEDIA, GENRES OR ARTISTS

A large Thomas Yeo work in acrylic on canvas can set you back by more than \$20,000 as he may sometimes work on a piece for two or three years and this effort is reflected in the price.

But at his last exhibition at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in April last year, he offered a series of gouache on paper landscape works, some of which were priced less than \$15,000.

While Yeo says he does not do prints as he has never "clicked" with the medium, there are more than a few artists who have worked in the medium.

These works, because they can be

reproduced, tend to be priced lower than the more labour-intensive oil and acrylic works.

Ms Rita Targui, 49, gallery director of STPI - Creative Workshop & Gallery, lists a whole roll call of established Singapore artists who have produced print works at STPI during residencies, ranging from Han Sai Por and Suzann Victor to Chua Ek Kay and Jimmy Ong.

While there is the perception that print is secondary to artists' core practice, Ms Targui says: "I would encourage collectors to keep an open mind about discovering works on paper and embrace both the conceptual and production possibilities."

Another route to bargain-hunting is to check out certain overlooked artists and genres.

Mr Ho points out that works by artists such as Nafa founder Lim Hak Tai and watercolourist Ong Chye Cho, who co-founded the Singapore Watercolour Society, can still be had for less than \$10,000.

A pair of couplets by noted calligrapher and poet Pan Shou costs between \$3,000 and \$6,000, as calligraphy is an under-appreciated art-form in Singapore.

Occasionally, galleries will also do special events, such as Chan + Hori's Instagram flash sale last year where it gathered 30 artists to create and sign a postcard-sized work of art, each priced at \$250.

As the artists were a mix of newcomers and established names, buyers had a chance to score a bargain if they were savvy enough to recognise a veteran artist's style.



Artcommune Gallery's Mr Ho Sou Ping says his gallery has access to several thousand works which may not be displayed, so if you do not see anything you like, just ask. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

Mr Ho says his gallery has access to several thousand works, either in storage or available for sale from collectors.

Another open secret in the art world is that you can pay in instalments if you have built a relationship with the gallery or the artist.

Veteran painter Thomas Yeo recalls allowing one collector, a university lecturer, to pay him in

instalments for a \$5,000 work about 30 years ago.

Mr Ho adds that even some rich collectors will negotiate with galleries to pay for six-figure sums in instalments.

But gallerists are quick to add such requests are usually entertained on a "case-by-case" basis, so this is more reason for budding collectors to attend events to get to know gallerists and artists.



Painter Yeo Hoe Koon is easily contactable via Facebook. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

4 TALK TO THE ARTISTS

All the artists The Sunday Times spoke to say they are happy to chat with potential buyers and discuss their art. Artists are usually present at openings, but there are other ways to meet them.

Veteran painter Thomas Yeo, 82, says he is happy to open up his studio at Telok Kurau Studios, or even his home where he stores works, to collectors.

Painter Yeo Hoe Koon runs a small space, Echo Art Galerie, at Tanglin Shopping Centre and is easily contactable via Facebook.

The sprightly 84-year-old says with a conspiratorial smile that his prices also depend on "ren qing wei", a Chinese phrase referring to the quality of relationships. Prices for his works start from as low as \$2,000, depending on its size and whether it is framed.

Sculptor Chong Fah Cheong, 73, conducts small workshops where potential collectors can interact with him. "I would rather the people who are interested in my work get to know me in a more meaningful way."

The Sculpture Society (Singapore) helps facilitate Mr Chong's workshops, so track its web page for information.

In this wired age, even the older artists are plugged in with web and Facebook pages, complete with contact details. Cultural Medallion recipient and visually impaired artist Chng Seok Tin, 73, says if you are shy, then just check out her website and Facebook pages: "Have a look first, then get in touch with me."

Her works are also available at the Singapore Association for the Visually Handicapped, where a portion of the sales goes towards the charity.

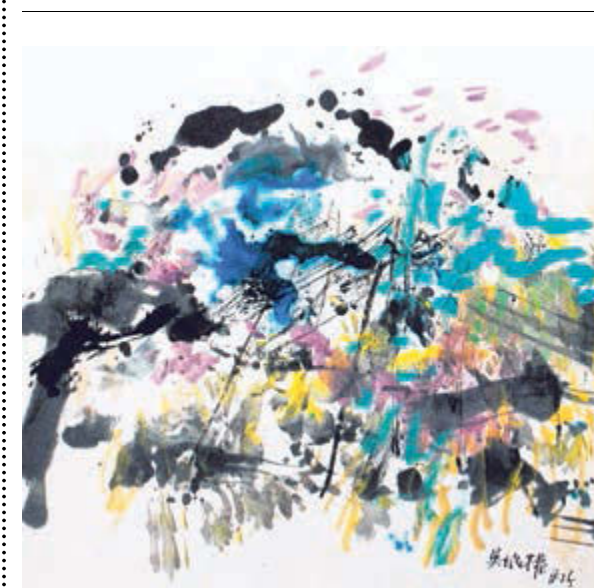
Mr Chong adds: "Singapore is small. It's not hard to find us."

Singapore masters for less than \$5,000



HAN SAI POR, 76, SCULPTOR
Renowned for her marble and granite works, this Cultural Medallion recipient is inspired by nature, which provides her with motifs of forests, plants and seeds for her works.

Work: Tropical Fruit 10, powder pigment, shaped cotton paper, sculpted colour abacca paper pulp, 8 x 22 x 20cm, \$2,500, from STPI - Creative Workshop & Gallery



GOH BENG KWAN, 82, PAINTER

This Cultural Medallion award recipient studied Chinese ink and oils with another Singapore master, Chen Wen Hsi, before leaving to deepen his artistic practice in New York.

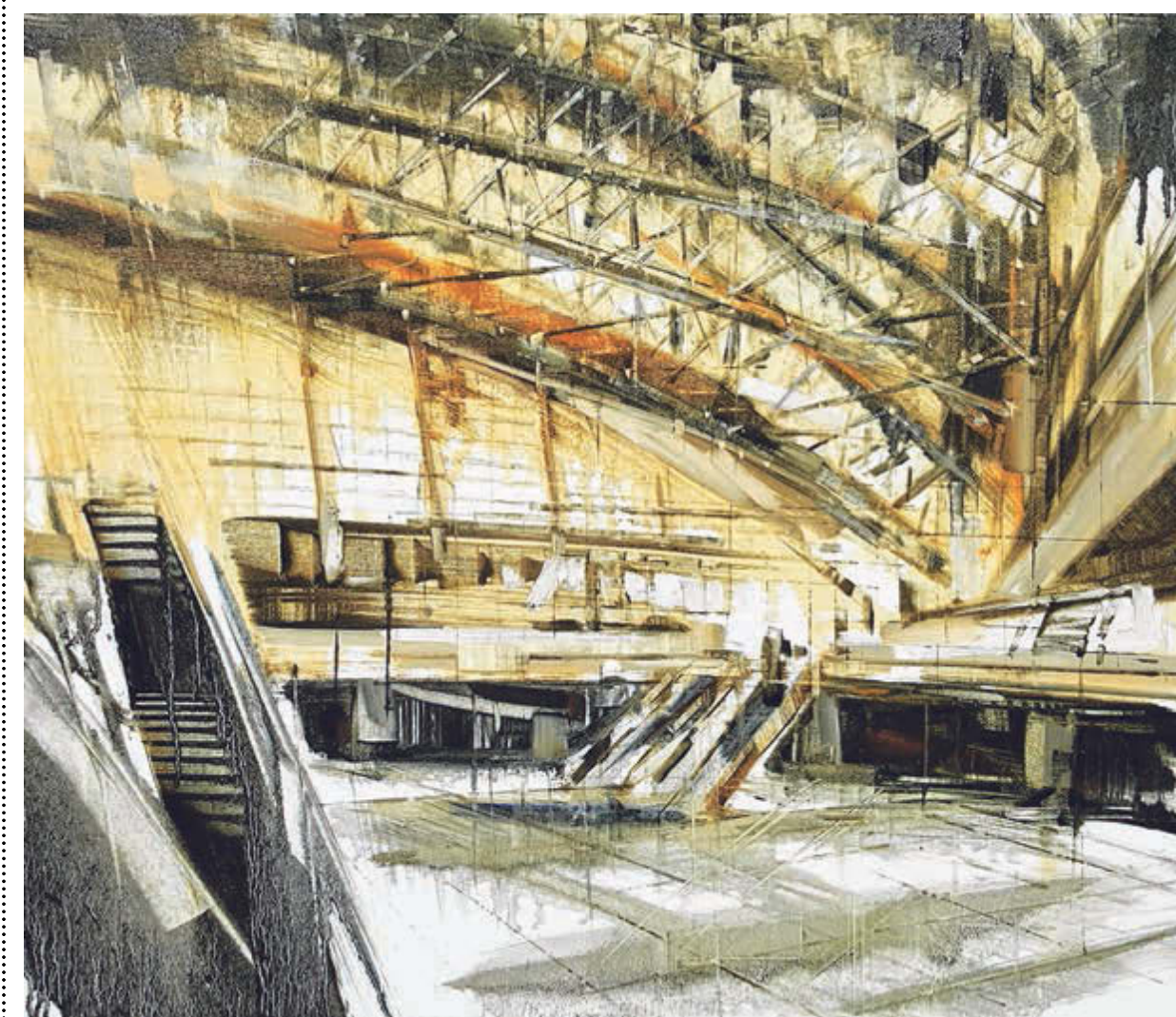
Works: Call of The Mountain, mixed media, 26 x 24 inches (framed size), \$4,000, from Eagle's Eye Gallery



CHOO KENG KWANG, 88, PAINTER

This first-generation painter works mainly with oils, and pieces can go for six-figure sums. His vivid woodcuts, which capture visceral scenes of Singapore's post-war realities, can be had for under \$5,000.

Work: Stove Maker, woodblock print, 17 x 15 inches (framed size), \$3,000, from Eagle's Eye Gallery



BOO SZE YANG, 53, PAINTER

Boo trained at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and is known for his technique in which he drips, combs, scratches and wipes paint on the canvas.

Work: Incheon International Airport, oil on canvas, 60 x 70cm, \$4,400, from Utterly Art

ARTWORKS LESS THAN \$15,000: See C4

JASON LIM, 53, CERAMICIST AND PERFORMANCE ARTIST
His work for the Singapore pavilion at the renowned Venice Biennale in 2007 featured a 250kg porcelain chandelier which he created, then shattered. Lim also has smaller works, such as this piece which challenges traditional notions of ceramics.

Work: Germination, glazed stoneware, 100 x 36 x 11cm, \$3,200, from Gajah Gallery

EATING DISORDERS AWARENESS WEEK PUBLIC FORUM & BOOK LAUNCH

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For Eating Disorders Recovery

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Singapore General Hospital, Block 6 Level 1, Learning Space (opposite Block 4 Pharmacy)

Programme
09:30 AM Registration
10:00 AM Welcome Address and Book Launch
10:20 AM How Families Can Help
10:45 AM It takes a Village. Role of the Multi-disciplinary Team in Treating Eating Disorders
11:00 AM The "Me" in Recovery, Self Empowerment in Recovery
11:15 AM Stories of Hope
11:30 AM Q & A
11:45 AM Refreshment

Register by 27 Feb 2019: <http://sghed2019.eventbrite.sg>
ed.publicforum@sggh.com.sg

Refreshments are provided

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PATIENTS. AT THE HEART OF ALL WE DO.

Successful ageing



Mrs Khosa enjoys planning and organising events that help seniors lead more active lifestyles. PHOTO: JAC WOO

Always on the move

Octogenarian Sarjit Kaur Khosa keeps herself active by organising Active Ageing Programmes for fellow seniors

Jac Woo

At the age of 86, former educator Mrs Sarjit Kaur Khosa could have settled into a relaxing life away from bustling classrooms. Instead, she is busy organising Active Ageing Programmes (AAPs) for seniors in her community, who are mostly younger than her. AAPs are exercise sessions, workshops and social activities that encourage the elderly to stay active, healthy and socially engaged. “I look forward to planning events and organising activities. I think it’s because I was a career woman that I need to organise my day. It keeps me active,” says Mrs Khosa, a retired teacher and former vice-principal of Anderson Secondary School. While she loved sports and playing netball in her youth, her interests shifted to reading, teaching and doing social work as she grew older and started her career. A widow now, with a 55-year-old son who has settled down overseas, Mrs Khosa lives with a helper, but is very independent. The sprightly octogenarian is physically active and still drives. “I think I can drive better than I walk,” she says with a laugh.

STARTED WITH CHAIR YOGA
About 12 years ago, Mrs Khosa came across Chair Yoga when she participated in the sessions at WINGS (Women’s Initiative for Ageing Successfully).

I look forward to planning events and organising activities. I think it’s because I was a career woman that I need to organise my day. It keeps me active.



MRS SARJIT KAUR KHOSA, 86

Chair Yoga is a modified form of yoga, where the poses can be done while one is seated in a chair. “Yoga is typically done on the floor but many seniors have problems sitting on the ground. I enjoyed Chair Yoga and felt that it would be very suitable for the old ladies in my community, who usually just sit around in the temple to pass the time,” she recalls. In 2007, she spearheaded the Chair Yoga programme at the Singapore Khalsa Association Ladies Wing. Thereafter, she helped to organise Chair Yoga and other programmes for seniors at the Sikh Welfare Council (SIWEC). “We now have almost 200 participants in two temples — Central Sikh Gurdwara and Silat Road Sikh Temple,” says Mrs Khosa, who is in SIWEC’s management committee. The activities organised there are mainly for seniors aged above 65, and include health talks by the Health Promotion Board, as well as exercise sessions, handicraft workshops and fun-filled outings to attractions like Gardens by the Bay and the Night Safari. The programmes are usually held on weekday afternoons, with breaks during the school holidays, when the seniors may want to spend more time with their families.

WHAT KEEPS HER GOING
Mrs Khosa feels very encouraged by the enthusiasm and positive changes in the participants. She shares: “Some of them were feeling negative earlier — they didn’t know how to pass their time and were depressed because their children had no time for them. “After joining the activities, they became very happy because they have a social circle now. “Even those in wheelchairs come along with their helpers to join our activities.” She is also glad that many of them saw the activities as an opportunity to meet friends and get out of the house, and were always asking for more. During the holiday break, some would tell her, “We don’t want a break” or “When are you starting another session?” Some with fractures even attended the activities, bandages and all, saying: “We just want to watch and listen. We won’t do the exercises.” She finds the letters of appreciation she receives from family members of the participants very encouraging, as they noticed positive changes in their loved ones after attending the programmes. She is glad that she can play a role in helping both the elderly community and herself to lead more active and healthier lifestyles. “I am very happy with what I am doing. Although I have some aches and pain in my knees, I keep on moving,” she says.

This series is an initiative under the Action Plan for Successful Ageing.

STAY ACTIVE IN YOUR GOLDEN YEARS

- Active Ageing Programmes encourage seniors to stay active, healthy and socially engaged.
- You can join activities that are located in your neighbourhood, such as group exercise sessions, health workshops, healthy cooking classes and social activities.
- Visit bit.ly/ageactively or call the Singapore Silver Line on 1800-650-6060 (Monday to Friday: 8.30am to 8.30pm, or Saturday: 8.30am to 4pm. Closed on Sundays and public holidays).

I feel young when I’m active!



Active Ageing Programmes

Be healthy, active and make new friends!

- 1 Sweat it out**
Get moving with resistance band exercises, low-impact aerobics, qigong and more!
- 2 Stay socially connected**
Bond with friends over activities like Rummy-O, karaoke and playing the ukulele.
- 3 Sign up for good health**
Learn to make healthier lifestyle choices at workshops or whip up a healthy meal at cooking classes.

Visit bit.ly/ageactively or call the **Singapore Silver Line** at **1800 650 6060*** to find out more.

*Monday to Friday: 8.30am to 8.30pm or Saturday: 8.30am to 4pm except public holidays.

ifeelyoungSG



Singapore
Legends

An A-Z of the nation's iconic talents

The Sunday Times' A-Z of Singapore legends in the arts, sports and entertainment is by no means definitive. Think of it as a starting point for debate and discovery, and write to stlife@sph.com.sg on who you think should make the list



Ang Peng Siong
Swimmer

Before Joseph Schooling, there was Ang. Nicknamed Asia's "Flying Fish", the freestyle specialist was the world's top-ranked men's 50m freestyle swimmer in 1982, when he clocked 22.69 seconds at the United States National Championships.

He then won the 100m freestyle event at the Asian Games that same year in New Delhi, India, and won the consolation final at the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

His pet event, the 50m race, was not offered at the 1984 Games, but made its Olympic debut four years later in Seoul, where Ang – who had a six-month deferment from full-time national service – finished ninth in the heats and missed out on the finals by one place.

The three-time Sportsman of the Year also has eight SEA Games golds from 1983 to 1993. He retired from competitive swimming in 1993.

The 56-year-old currently runs the APS Swim School, which he founded in 1996.

Lim Say Heng



Bonny Hicks
Model and writer

The Eurasian beauty first came to attention as a model – appearing on covers, advertisements, runways and a music video for home-grown band The Oddfellows' Your Smiling Face – after she was discovered fresh out of junior college.

But it was Hicks the writer who arguably made a more lasting impact – on Singapore's literary scene.

At age 22, she published Singapore's first celebrity tell-all book, *Excuse Me, Are You A Model?*. It was controversial as she detailed both her modelling career and romances with men and one woman, photographer Pat Chan.

It was also an instant hit, with its first print run of 12,000 selling out on the finals by one place.

She also contributed a short-lived fortnightly personal column to *The Straits Times* in 1990 and 1991.

She died tragically at the age of 29, a victim of SilkAir Flight 185, which crashed into the Musi River in Indonesia on Dec 19, 1997.

Jan Lee



Catherine Lim
Writer

Lim, 76, is considered the grande dame of local literature. She was the first Singaporean author to have two short story collections – *Little Ironies: Stories of Singapore* (1978) and *Or Else, The Lightning God And Other Stories* (1980) – studied as O-level texts internationally.

The Malaya-born author, who formerly worked for Singapore's Ministry of Education, is known for her popular historical novels, many about tragic Chinese women and forbidden love.

She self-published her novel, *The Bondmaid* (1995), about a girl sold into child slavery in 1950s Singapore who falls in love with her master, after local publishers deemed her manuscript too "adult". It topped local bestseller lists and was picked up by international publishing houses.

Lim has also made waves for her political commentary. In 1994, she had an essay published in *The Straits Times* about the divide between the People's Action Party and Singaporeans, for which she was rebuked by then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in Parliament.

Olivia Ho



Dick Lee
Singer and songwriter

From pop music and national songs to theatre and television, Lee, 62, has had quite an impact on the Singapore music scene in the last five decades.

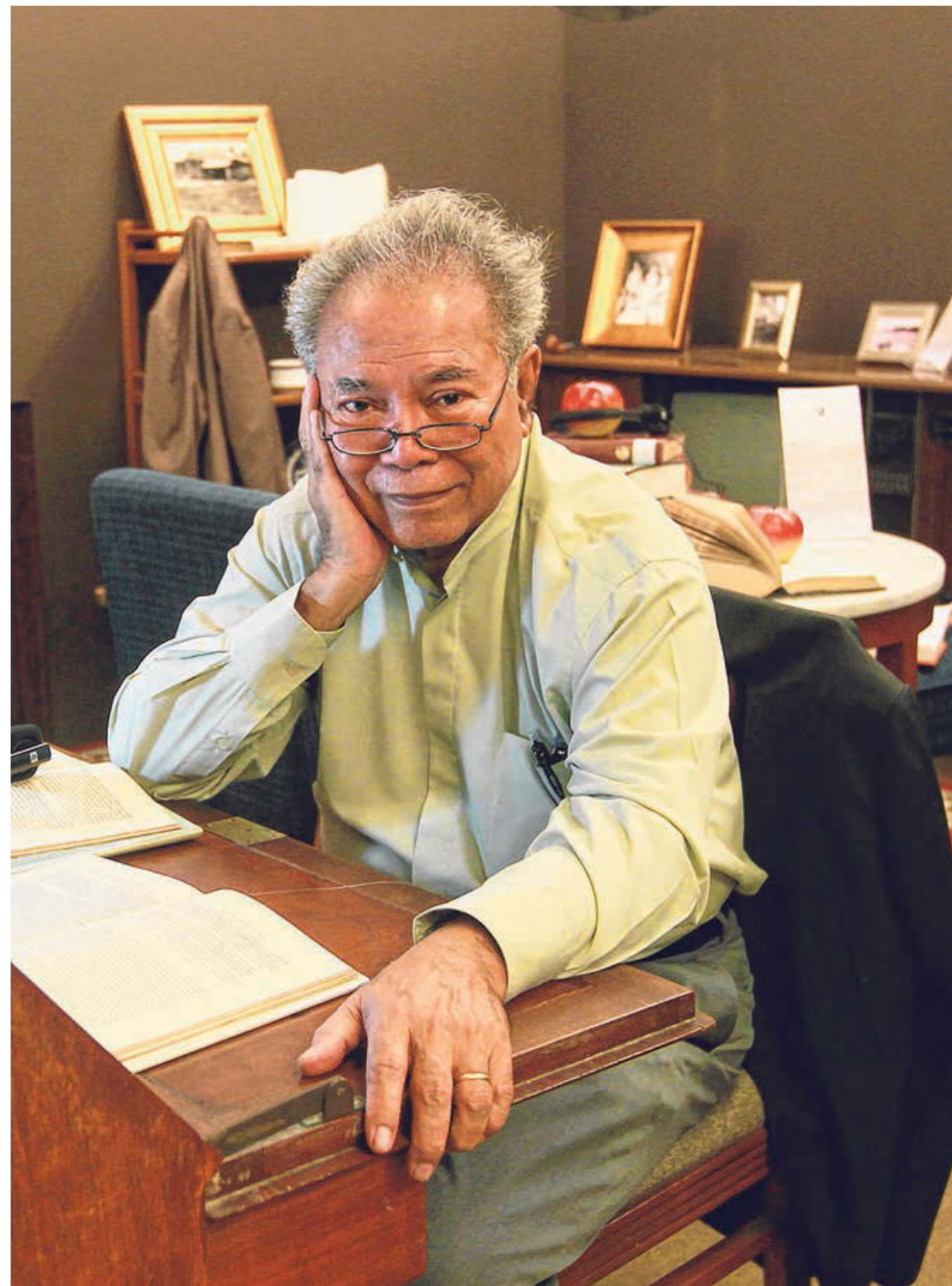
His composition *Home*, sung by Kit Chan and the theme song for the 1998 National Day Parade, is a National Day staple, while his 1989 album, *The Mad Chinaman*, is a local pop classic.

He is known for musicals such as *Beauty World* (1988) and *Fried Rice Paradise* (1991), and has appeared on television shows such as *Singapore Idol*, on which he was a judge for all three seasons (2004, 2006 and 2009).

He has also made an impact regionally through his work on Hong Kong musical *Snow Wolf Lake* (1997) and with songs for stars such as Sandy Lam.

Awarded the Cultural Medallion in 2005, he is one of the few famous people here who have had a movie – *Wonder Boy* (2017), which he co-wrote and co-directed – made about their lives.

Eddino Abdul Hadi



Edwin Thumboo
Poet

Were Singapore to have a poet laureate, it would be Emeritus Professor Thumboo, 85.

The first-ever Cultural Medallion recipient for literature, he has been lauded for shaping Singapore's English literary canon.

His poetry, including the collections *Gods Can Die* (1977), *Ulysses By The Merlion* (1979) and *A Third Map* (1993), often deals with history and national identity.

His most iconic poem is *Ulysses*, a hero of Greek mythology, contemplates the Merlion. It has inspired several poetic responses, including ones by Lee Tzu Pheng and Allan Sa'at.

He has also edited numerous anthologies, such as *The Flowering Tree* (1970), one of Singapore's earliest English-language poetry and fiction anthologies, and co-founded the Ministry of Education's Creative Arts Programme in 1991 to mentor young writers.

He was the dean of the National University of Singapore's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences from 1980 to 1991 and remains an Emeritus Professor there today.

Olivia Ho



Fandi Ahmad
Footballer

It has been two decades since Fandi retired from the national team, but at the age of 56, he remains Singapore's most popular footballer.

From brave headers to acrobatic volleys to tap-ins, the striker scored lots of goals throughout his career, including the decider in a 2-1 Malaysia Cup Final win over Selangor in 1980, when he was 18. His friendly personality also endears him to fans.

He went on to win three Malaysia Cup titles with Kuala Lumpur (1987 and 1988) and Pahang (1992) before returning to lead an exciting Singapore side, dubbed the Dream Team, to a Malaysia League and Cup double in 1994.

Married to South African model Wendy Jacobs, Fandi has four sons and a daughter. His eldest sons, Irfan and Ikhsan, are now fixtures in the national team.

Wang Meng Meng



Georgette Chen
Painter

The only woman in the group of pioneer artists known as the Nanyang School, Chen was the epitome of the sophisticated cosmopolitan in both her art and her life.

From her 1946 self-portrait (above) at the National Gallery Singapore, you can see the confidence radiating from her direct gaze, elegantly arched brows and sleekly rolled hair lending her an air of understated chic.

Her works are renowned for their blending of Western techniques with Asian themes and motifs, a cultural melding characteristic of the Nanyang artists.

Born in 1906 to an antiques and arts dealer father in Zhejiang, China, she grew up shuttling among Paris, New York and Shanghai. She studied art at the Academie Colarossi and Academie Biloul in Paris as well as the Art Students League in New York.

In 1930, she married China's foreign minister Eugene Chen Youren and her work was accepted for exhibition at the Salon d'Automne in Paris.

Her husband died in 1944. Her marriage to his ex-aidé Ho Yung Chi ended in divorce in 1953. She settled here, where she taught part-time at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts from 1954 to 1980. The Cultural Medallion recipient died at Mount Alvernia Hospital in 1993 after a long battle with rheumatoid arthritis.

Ong Sor Fern



Hanis Hussey
Model

One of Singapore's biggest fashion exports, Hussey is arguably the most iconic local model of all time.

The first Singaporean model to appear on the runway of Paris Fashion Week, she had the coveted job of closing the Fall/Winter show of French label Yves Saint Laurent in 1983.

Discovered at the age of 16, she regularly secured international gigs, walking the runways for top luxury fashion names such as Givenchy, Balmain and Christian Dior.

She was on the cover of *Time Magazine Asia* in 1997 for a story on anti-ageing scientific innovations.

She retired from modelling in 1997 to spend more time with her three children – two daughters and a son.

Now 54, she is based in Dallas, Texas, and runs a personal image and grooming consultancy business, *Style Power* by Hanis Hussey.

Jan Lee



Iskandar Jalli
Ceramist

Iskandar, 79, was a late bloomer when it came to pottery.

Born the youngest of five children, he grew up in Kampong Chantek in Bukit Timah. He was a mathematics and science teacher, with an interest in art, before his second Colombo Plan scholarship took him to Japan in 1972, where he fell in love with pottery.

Apprenticed to Japanese folk art ceramist Shoji Hamada, he developed an appreciation for Japanese philosophy and culture, and became enamoured of the Mingei craft movement of the early 1900s, which celebrated handmade craftsmanship and the beauty of utilitarian objects.

Iskandar's works are often earthy simple but richly tactile, with textured surfaces and incorporating twigs as accents.

His fondness for blue oxide is now his signature, with the hue known as Iskandar Blue.

He was awarded the Cultural Medallion in 1988 and when he returned to Japan in 2000, his old teacher conferred on him the title of "master potter". He is also the only Singapore artist to have been conferred the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette, by the Emperor of Japan, in recognition of his contributions to cultural exchange between Japan and Singapore.

Ong Sor Fern



Jamaludeen Mohamed Sali
Writer

Prolific author J.M. Sali, 80, has churned out more than 400 short stories, 80 plays and 200 articles in his career as a writer and journalist.

Born in Madra, India, in 1939 to a betel-leaf seller and his wife, Sali arrived in Singapore in 1964 to join the newspaper *Tamil Murasu*.

Then aged 25, he was already a popular writer who contributed to magazines in India.

His writing in Tamil runs the gamut from serious to pop cultural. His book *Alalak Pesukirana* (The Sound Of The Waves), which was used at SIM University as a text for students studying Tamil, tackled themes of love and sacrifice in its story about a married man in India who moves to Singapore and is forced by circumstances to marry another woman. He has also written biographies of popular figures such as actor Bruce Lee and boxer Muhammad Ali.

For his contributions to Tamil writing, he was awarded the Cultural Medallion in 2012 and has also earned other accolades, such as the SEA Write Award, which honours South-east Asian writers.

Ong Sor Fern



Kuo Pao Kun
Dramatist

A doyen of Singapore drama, Kuo's works transcended languages. The Cultural Medallion recipient wrote 25 plays, including landmark works such as *Mama Looking For Her Cat*, which was the first local play to make use of a babel of seven languages and dialects, as well as the monologue *The Coffin Is Too Big For The Hole* and the lyrical *Descendants Of The Eunuch Admiral*.

Kuo, who was born in China and wrote in English and Chinese, was detained for 4½ years for communist sympathies in the late 1970s and stripped of his Singapore citizenship, which was reinstated only in 1992. Nevertheless, he carried on with theatre full-time.

His Practice Performing Arts School, which he founded with his dancer-choreographer wife Goh Lay Kuan, trained prominent theatre practitioners such as Ivan Heng, Alvin Tan and Ong Keng Sen.

He also founded Practice Theatre Ensemble, Singapore's first bilingual theatre company, now called The Theatre Practice, and experimental arts space The Substation.

He died in 2002 at the age of 63, from kidney and liver cancer.

Olivia Ho



Liu Thai Ker
Architect

Mr Liu, 81, is often credited as the "architect of modern Singapore" in recognition of his contributions to shaping Singapore's urban landscape.

The former master planner oversaw the completion of more than half a million public housing units and led a major revision of the Concept Plan in the early 1990s, which is used to map out the long-term plans for Singapore's land use.

He helmed the Housing and Development Board (HDB) for two decades and was chief planner and chief executive of the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) before joining RSP Architects Planners & Engineers in 1992, where he spent 25 years as senior director.

In 2015, he famously argued that Singapore could support a population of 10 million people with proper urban planning, causing much controversy.

Not one to rest on his laurels, he left the firm in 2017 at age 79 to start his own practice, called *Morrow*, where he continues to play an active role.

Mr Liu is also the founding chairman of the Centre for Liveable Cities, a local think-tank that focuses on creating liveable and sustainable cities.

Michelle Ng



Maria Menado
Actress

Maria, 87, is best known as the screen legend who played the titular character, a woman turned bloodsucking ghoul, in the film *Pontianak*. The 1957 box-office hit by Cathay-Keris Studio made history as the first Malay horror film.

More than just an actress, she was also the first female Malay producer. She formed her own company, Maria Menado Production, which released films such as *Siti Zubaidah* (1961) and *Daralku* (My Blood, 1963).

Born in Indonesia, she first came to Singapore in the early 1950s as a model.

She took on her first acting role opposite entertainment icon P. Ramlee in 1951 drama *Penghidupan* (Life), which was produced by Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions at its Jalan Ampas studio here.

She made a cameo in 2015 home-grown romantic comedy *Our Sister Mambo*, a film that marked Cathay's 80th anniversary.

She now lives in Malaysia.

Eddino Abdul Hadi



Nona Asiah
Singer

A singing sensation by age 19, Nona was one of the most popular singers during the golden era of the silver screen, and sang on films such as 1953's *Hujan Panas* (Hot Rain) and 1957's *Bujang Lapok* (Raggedy Bachelors).

The singer, 89, was a protégé of Zubir Said, composer of Singapore's national anthem. They worked together on a number of projects and he used her singing voice for popular actresses such as Rose Yatimah and Latifah Omar.

In the 1970s, she produced many children's songs that are still popular today, including the *Selamat Hari Raya* song.

In addition, she groomed several young talents who appeared on the iconic children's television series *Mat Yoyo*, which aired in the 1980s on the then Singapore Broadcasting Corporation.

For her contributions to the Malay entertainment industry, she was conferred the Cultural Medallion in 2016.

Benson Ang

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF DICK LEE, HER WORLD, LIANHE ZHAODI NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL, NATIONAL BOOK DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, ST FILE, THE ARTS HOUSE, THE NEW PAPER



Ong Kim Seng
Watercolourist

Before becoming an artist, Ong, 74, held an assortment of jobs, ranging from bill collector and policeman to welder and factory supervisor.

An only child, he grew up in a kampung in Tiong Bahru. After his father died, his mother worked as a washerwoman and grass-cutter to support the family. A self-taught artist, Ong worked in charcoal and oil before focusing on watercolour in the 1960s.

He is a realist painter, depicting architecture, landscapes and street scenes with impressionistic washes of colour. He is famed for his paintings of the Singapore River and old shophouse scenes.

The avid trekker has hiked the Himalayas more than seven times. His travels inspired paintings such as *Gysante Market* (a scene from a Central Tibet flea market) and *Thimi, Nepal*, which won various prizes.

He was awarded the Cultural Medallion in 1990. Last year, he was named one of the top 25 watercolour artists in the world by an international jury of artists and critics during the Watercolour International, a biennial festival.

He was the first artist living in Asia to be accepted into the renowned American Watercolour Society.

Ong Sor Fern



Pan Xiuqiong
Singer

Nicknamed Singapore's Queen of Bass for her rich, deep voice, singer Pan was once described by the late former Singapore president Ong Teng Cheong as a "guo bao" – Chinese for national treasure.

One of the nation's earliest superstar singers, she was among the biggest stars in the Chinese pop world in the 1960s and 1970s.

Her signature tune, *Lover's Tears*, was immensely popular and has been covered by numerous artists, from Hong Kong singers Sandy Lam and Jacky Cheung to the late Taiwanese singer Teresa Teng.

Some of the most well-known songs by Taiwanese stars Fei Yu-ching and Tsai Chin were also originally performed by Pan, who is now in her 80s.

She has recorded so many full-length albums that she once said in an interview with *The Straits Times* that she has lost count of the exact number.

Benson Ang



Quah Kim Song
Footballer

The 1970s was a time when Singaporeans flocked to the National Stadium to watch a flamboyant football team in action.

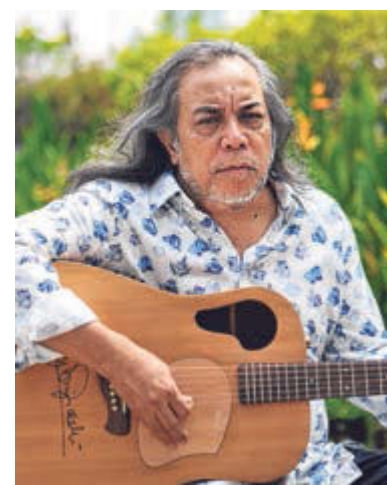
In a national squad full of players with signature skills, such as S. Rajagopal and his banana kick, Dollah Kassim and his body feints, and slick dribbler Mohamed Noh, the most popular player was, arguably, striker Quah, now 67.

He scored with his party piece, the diving header, in extra-time to secure Singapore's 3-2 win over Penang in the 1977 Malaysia Cup Final.

That star-studded team regularly played in front of full houses at the 55,000-capacity National Stadium.

Song, as he is popularly known, is part of the famous Quah sporting family: 10 out of the 11 siblings represented Singapore. For four decades, there was at least one of the Quah brothers in the national football team, from elder brother Kim Beng in 1954 to Kim Song, who played for the country from 1968 to 1983.

Wang Meng Meng



Ramli Sarip
Singer and songwriter

Affectionately known as "Papa Rock", singer-songwriter Ramli is a pioneer in the regional Malay rock music scene.

The 66-year-old started out as the frontman for home-grown hard rock trailblazers Sweet Charity, which were formed in the late 1960s.

In their heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, the band played to crowds of up to 50,000. Each of their albums sold as many copies, with pirated versions probably selling more. The quintet helped to kick-start the Malay rock boom.

Ramli built an equally impactful career as a singer and songwriter after he went solo in the mid-1980s and is still a top draw in the Malay music scene here and in Malaysia.

He played to an audience of 10,000 last month at his performance at social and cultural heritage hub Wisma Geylang Serai.

Eddino Abdul Hadi



Santha Bhaskar
Dancer and choreographer

The renowned classical Indian dancer, 79, began performing in Singapore in the 1950s.

Defying cultural purists, she has fused traditional Indian styles with Chinese, Malay, Thai and Western influences over the years.

The Cultural Medallion recipient was born in India and came to Singapore in 1955.

Her husband by arranged marriage, the late K.P. Bhaskar, set up dance school Bhaskar's Arts Academy in 1952.

Today, she is the school's artistic director and chief choreographer.

As a young dancer, she was immortalised in 1968 on a local postage stamp from a series released to promote racial harmony.

Some of her most distinctive works have been her rendition of classic Chinese folk tale *The Butterfly Lovers* as an Indian dance drama in 1958, when she was just 19; and *Rasa & Dhvani* (2003) at the Esplanade, in which she set verses by Singaporean poets in all four official languages to dance.

Olivia Ho



Tan Howe Liang
Weightlifter

On Sept 8, 1960, sporting history was made as Tan became the first Singaporean to win an Olympic medal as he finished second in the weightlifting lightweight (60 to 67.5kg) category.

Shrugging off the pain in his legs, Tan, now 85, refused to give up even though he was advised by doctors to withdraw from the competition to get treatment.

He proceeded to lift a total of 380kg to pip Iraq's Abdul Wahid Aziz to the silver medal and finished behind Russia's Viktor Bushuev.

In the process, he also showed his grit and determination to the world by bouncing back from a previous disappointment. He had competed at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, but finished ninth as he blacked out during an attempt.

He also won gold medals at the Commonwealth Games (1958, 1962), Asian Games (1958) and South-east Asia Peninsular Games, now known as the SEA Games (1959).

Wang Meng Meng



Lim Say Heng
Sprinter

The former national sprinter holds the national men's 100m record of 10.37 seconds, which he clocked twice in 2001. He broke C. Kunalan's previous record of 10.38 seconds at the World University Games that year in Beijing and repeated the feat again a month later at the SEA Games, where he won the silver medal in the century sprint.

Even though the story of an athlete who suffers in the pursuit of greatness might be common, Shyam's journey is remarkable. Now 42, he grew up in a single-parent family, with his mother barely making ends meet as a tutor. To fuel his athletic dreams, he worked as a restaurant waiter and even ate leftovers and napped in toilets in between training.

He quit the sport for four months in 2000, citing a lack of support from the then-Singapore Athletic Association, before swim great Ang Peng Siong offered him a way back with a job offer at his swim school.

Lim Say Heng

MORE STORIES on C8

Veteran local acts rock on

Singapore Legends

Some Singapore musicians in their 60s and 70s just cannot stop performing and releasing new material



The Rythmn Boys comprise (from far left) M. Ali Taib, 72, Iskandar Khairuldin, 36, M. Ariff Taib, 69, Shah Shariff, 71, and Arshad Abdul Kadir, 69. PHOTO: COURTESY OF ESPLANADE – THEATRES ON THE BAY



Benson Ang
Lifestyle Correspondent

The veterans of Singapore's music scene might be into their 60s and 70s, but they show no sign of slowing down.

Quite a few continue to pursue their musical aspirations – performing regularly, releasing new material and pushing their boundaries to appease their ever-devoted fans.

About two weeks ago, during a Merdeka Generation tribute event at Gardens by the Bay, entertainers Dick Lee, Rahimah Rahim, Jacintha Abisheganaden and Mel Ferdinands debuted the song Merdeka Sayang, sung to the tune of Rasa Sayang.

Merdeka Sayang's lyrics, penned by Lee, convey the pride of the Merdeka Generation for the instrumental role they played in shaping Singapore's progress, as well as the can-do spirit they lived by and continue to embody today.

Lee, 62, says: "The four of us have known one another for many years and it was very nice to perform

together in the same room."

The new work was given a more contemporary treatment with a reggaeton music style, he says, adding that the track has been recorded and a music video for it is in production.

"We hope this song can inspire my generation to stay active and share how vibrant we are with younger generations."

Abisheganaden, 61, says: "We are a tough generation... (but) groovy and dark and still pretty fast. Can't touch this."

Some music veterans are venturing into new ground.

Cultural Medallion recipient Jeremy Monteiro, known for his piano playing, is also looking to explore a new skill – singing.

The 58-year-old jazz pianist is putting on a new series of gigs, called Jeremy Monteiro Sings, where he will play the piano and sing at the same time.

The first show is on March 15 at Relish restaurant in Bukit Timah.

He says: "Even though I love to sing, I have always been very shy about it. But now, I have decided to listen to my fans and get out of my comfort zone."

He plans to release a vocal album early next year.

Another veteran act going strong is home-grown Malay band The Rythmn Boys, best known for playing psychedelic rock songs in the 1960s.

They will hold two concerts at the Esplanade Recital Studio next



(From far left) Jacintha Abisheganaden, Mel Ferdinands, Rahimah Rahim and Dick Lee performing at Gardens by the Bay earlier this month at a Merdeka Generation tribute event. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

month. Initially, only one performance was planned, but the response was so good that a second show was added.

Formed in 1961, the current lineup consists of founding members M. Ali Taib on bass guitar, his younger brother M. Ariff Taib on drums as well as Shah Shariff on keyboards, Arshad Abdul Kadir on lead guitar and Iskandar Khairuldin on rhythm guitar.

All of them are in their 60s or 70s, except Iskandar, 36, who joined the band three years ago.

At their upcoming gig, expect them to play hits such as Oh Fatimah, Menanti (Wait) and Hidup Bersama (Live Together).

The band's leader, M. Ali, 72, says the show will be very special for them.

"We are the only Malay band that have been around for 58 years and we are very happy with the response. We promise it will be a good show," he says.

"Through the concert, we also hope to honour those who have played or sang with us in the past. As long as (the band) are alive and strong, our music will go on."

Home-grown band Jerry And The Neufaces, formed in 1972, are still active as well. They perform every Tuesday at Seletar Country Club, playing cover versions of songs such as Welsh singer Tom Jones'

Sex Bomb and English rock band Deep Purple's Smoke On The Water.

In addition, the band – comprising Singaporeans Jerry Fernandez, Mokhtar Hassan, Bisyuni Abdullah, Amir Amin and Jumahat Ibrahim – perform regularly at Pek Kio Community Centre, as part of a series called Pek Kio Keeps Rockin'.

Vocalist Fernandez, 70, says: "Times have changed and some of our friends and contemporaries have slowed down because they have become grandparents or have other commitments. But we keep pushing on."

bang@sph.com.sg

Catch them

BOOK IT / OH FATIMAH – THE RYTHMN BOYS CELEBRATION

WHERE: Esplanade Recital Studio, 1 Esplanade Drive
WHEN: March 15, 8pm; March 16, 11am
ADMISSION: \$25 (free seating) from Sistic (www.sistic.com.sg or call 6348-5555), tickets for March 16 go on sale tomorrow
INFO: www.esplanade.com

JEREMY MONTEIRO SINGS

WHERE: Relish at Cluny Court, 02-01, 501 Bukit Timah Road
WHEN: March 15, 8.30pm
ADMISSION: Minimum spending of \$40 a person at the restaurant
INFO: www.facebook.com/JeremyMonteiroFanpage

PEK KIO KEEPS ROCKIN

WHERE: Performance theatre at Pek Kio Community Centre, 21 Gloucester Road
WHEN: March 30, 7.30pm
ADMISSION: \$20 (free seating)
INFO: www.onepa.sg or call 6299-0565

FROM C6&7



Violet Oon
Restaurateur

Often described as Singapore's food doyenne, Violet Oon, 69, became a well-known name in the early 1980s as the food critic of the now-defunct The Singapore Monitor newspaper.

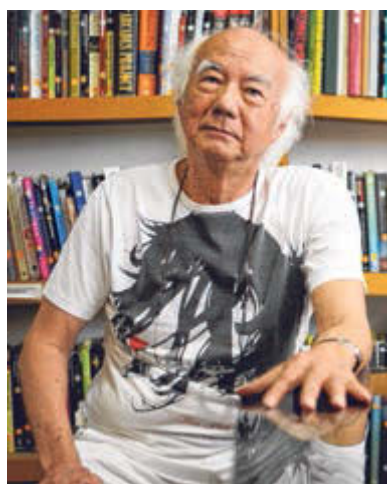
She later started her own tabloid, The Food Paper, and was an unofficial food ambassador at promotions organised by the then Singapore Tourist Promotion Board.

She also wrote cookbooks and, after some early failures, became a successful restaurateur.

Together with her son Tay Yiming and daughter Tay Su-lyn, she now owns four restaurants under her brand – including Violet Oon Singapore in Ion Orchard and National Kitchen in National Gallery Singapore – serving Singapore cuisines including Peranakan, Malay, Indian and Eurasian dishes.

There are plans to expand the business abroad to places such as London.

Wong Ah Yoke



William Lim
Architect

Pioneer architect William Lim, 87, is the man behind many iconic buildings, including Golden Mile Complex and People's Park Complex.

Throughout his career, he championed urban development and heritage issues, calling for the urban conservation of entire areas instead of just single buildings.

He was the co-founder and principal architect of three firms from 1960 to 2002, the last of which is William Lim Associates.

He retired from his architectural practice at the age of 70.

He has since published a number of books, including Incomplete Urbanism: A Critical Urban Strategy For Emerging Economies in 2012, which spawned an exhibition at the Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore.

Mr Lim, who is married with two children, is an ardent supporter and patron of the arts and culture scene in Singapore.

Michelle Ng



X'Ho
Radio personality and singer

X'Ho, or Chris Ho as he is also known, is a pop-culture personality who has been one of the most prominent faces and voices of the local music scene.

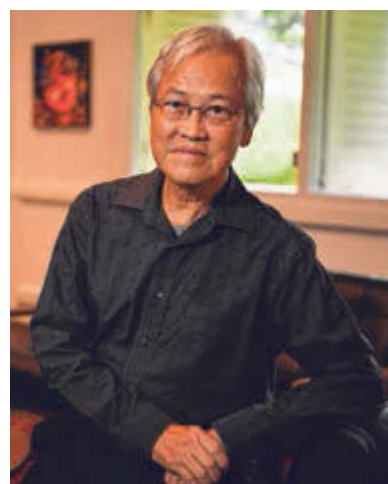
From fronting 1980s new wave band Zircon Lounge to writing about music as a columnist for various local and international publications, he has been instrumental in capturing the cultural zeitgeist.

He is also a familiar voice on the airwaves, having presented radio shows since the 1990s at stations including Radio Singapore International, 987FM and Lush 99.5FM.

He currently helms the evening drive time slot at Gold 90.5 FM.

Last year, he was awarded the prestigious Patron of Music award (above) by the Composers and Authors Society of Singapore.

Anjali Raguraman



Yeng Pway Ngon
Writer

The prolific Chinese-language writer and critic has won the Singapore Literature Prize three times and received the Cultural Medallion.

Yeng, 72, has published more than 25 volumes of poetry, fiction and essays, including Unrest (2002), Trivialities About Me And Myself (2006) and Art Studio (2011). The last novel is an epic that charts the lives of artists from the 1960s to the present. It was adapted for the stage for the 2017 Singapore International Festival of Arts.

An ex-newspaper columnist, he founded one of Singapore's most prominent Chinese bookstores, Grassroots Book Room. Originally at North Bridge Centre, it moved to Bukit Pasoh Road in 2014 after he sold it to three former customers.

In 1977, he was detained for four months under the Internal Security Act after he was accused of being a leftist. Despite having been diagnosed with two kinds of cancer, he continues to work on his next novel.

Olivia Ho



Zul Sutan
Singer and musician

A leading figure in the club music scene for more than four decades, singer and musician Zul entertained many with his soulful singing, crowd rapport and deft guitar skills.

With his rock band Tania, he built a loyal fan base who would follow him as he played at various nightspots ranging from Anywhere Music Pub to Harry's, as well as venues such as the Esplanade.

He released an acclaimed solo album, Zul, in 1992 and won the artistic excellence accolade at the Composers and Authors Society of Singapore awards last year.

A trouper of a musician, he was still performing live two months before he died of health complications at the age of 61 in December.

Eddino Abdul Hadi

PHOTOS: COMPASS, ESPLANADE – THEATRES BY THE BAY, ST FILE

A relentless pursuit to learn Mandarin

With the rise of China as well as the proven benefits of learning a second language, my husband and I have pulled out all the stops to help our two daughters develop a love of Mandarin



Paige Parker

“Hablo español,” (I speak Spanish) repeatedly rang out in Riverside Park when we lived in New York over a decade ago.

Spanish was the second language of choice for most parents, with babysitters and nannies hired to reinforce it with little ones on swings and scooters.

Now living in Singapore, I envy my local friends for their bilingualism and, as parents, we understand a second language is good for our children, with proven cognitive, educational and health benefits.

With the resounding rise of China, today’s parents are opting for Mandarin.

We have read articles touting tech gurus who are teaching their wee ones Mandarin, and in my small-time home town of Rocky Mount, North Carolina, with a population of 50,000, 10-year-olds are learning yi, er, san (one, two, three).

United States President Donald Trump’s granddaughter even speaks the language.

My husband Jim Rogers and I have seriously drunk the Kool-Aid, too, and our immigrant mentality makes us a bit fanatical in our quest for our daughters Happy, 15, at Nanyang Girls’ High, and Bee, 10, at Nanyang Primary School (NYPS), to speak standard Mandarin at the native level.

Jim, born in a tiny town in Alabama, with a population of 5,000, cannot speak the language.

In fact, he is tone-deaf. And when he first took me dancing, I asked why he did not keep the beat. “What beat?” he quipped.

I took French in high school, then placed out via testing in college. No Tiger Mum made me persist. I did study Mandarin when we lived in Manhattan, yet my speaking ability remains bu hao (not good), although I can understand anyone bad-mouthing me in the lift.

When we lived in New York, we hired Shirley, a former teacher in China, to train Happy in all things Chinese. Then in 2007, we moved to Singapore to be in Asia and for the Mandarin.

Once on the ground, I made calls, searched online and asked locals to

recommend the best Chinese school.

“I can’t believe there’s no pure Chinese curriculum in Singapore,” I grumbled to Jim over dinner one night. Quite annoyingly, he replied: “Someone didn’t do her homework.”

I soon discovered Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools that aim to preserve the core Chinese values and develop capable, bilingual students. Repeatedly, folks mentioned NYPS as a good choice for Happy. “Even the prime minister sent his children there,” several recommended.

When I saw a mention of an NYPS Primary 1 Registration discussion in The Straits Times, Jim and I attended, two years too soon we would learn.

Then-principal Heng Boey Hong wowed us with her smarts, commitment to discipline and incorporation of Chinese culture. Post-talk, Madam Heng suggested rather matter-of-factly: “You should visit other schools. Getting into Nanyang is terribly difficult.”

So much for my blue-eyed, Mandarin-speaking daughter knocking the socks off of Madam Heng.

Still determined, I became a parent volunteer, clocking more than 100 hours in the English department’s Reading Mums programme and even moved my family within 1km of NYPS to improve our chances in the event of balloting.

We were lucky. There were 31 applicants for Phase 2B with 30 spots available (2003 was a low-birth year, due to severe acute respiratory syndrome), and all applicants for that phase gained a coveted place, after one parent decided on another school. (Laws have since changed, making it almost impossible for a permanent resident’s child to enter high-demand schools.)

What a riot it was when, after completing school registration forms, an official called, explaining: “Ms Parker, you must list Mandarin as her mother tongue to attend NYPS.”

Even though Happy spoke as a native, how could I check the box



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

for Mandarin as her mother tongue since I, her mother, was too incompetent to speak it?

Betting on her future, I returned to the school declaring my daughter Happy to have a mother tongue which no one in her family could speak.

“You’re so lucky, Paige. Both Happy and Bee adore Mandarin,” I hear regularly.

The truth is we labour persistently to build this love and it is not easy. We try to spend time in China and offer exposure through Mandarin books, movies, playgroups, cooking, singing – never solely through classwork and tuition.

Children never love anything that is a chore, right?

Both girls have participated in Chinese dance, speech and drama, wushu and art, all taught in Mandarin. Always keen to be on

stage, they join Mandarin-speaking contests and, sometimes, if they win, Jim and I sit stunned, albeit thrilled.

I am right there with other parents agonising over the difficulty of Mandarin for our children.

They say Mandarin fluency requires a whopping 2,200 class hours while English needs only 600 for a similar level of fluency. I mean really.

There is no easy fix, so I am trying to build a love of the language, culture and country, making it relevant whenever possible.

My girls, although they work really hard trying to master the language, do not top their classes for sure (although Happy comes pretty close), and comprehension remains a real challenge for Bee (“Read more Chinese books” is my mantra).

Mandarin continues to gain in popularity as the young realise their futures will be hen hao (very good) if they master it.

What if I am wrong? If Mandarin is not supremely important in my daughters’ lifetimes? No regrets.

I am betting this experience will shape my daughters into accepting and resilient adults.

With more than one billion Chinese, my daughters should be able to gain good jobs, start out-of-the-box companies and always revere me, their Caucasian Tiger Mum, with xie xie (thank you) in abundance.

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• Paige Parker is a mother of two, published author, gemologist and supporter of the arts. She is married to American investor Jim Rogers.

The joy of being a woman in her 70s

Mary Pipher

When I told my friends I was writing a book on older women like us, they immediately protested: “I am not old.”

What they meant was that they did not act or feel like the cultural stereotypes of women their age.

Old meant bossy, useless, unhappy and in the way. America’s ideas about old women are so toxic that almost no one, no matter her age, will admit she is old.

In the United States, ageism is a bigger problem for women than ageing. Our bodies and sexuality are devalued, we are denigrated by mother-in-law jokes and we are rendered invisible in the media.

Yet, most of the women I know describe themselves as being in a vibrant and happy life stage. We are resilient and know how to thrive in the margins. Our happiness comes from self-knowledge, emotional intelligence and empathy for others.

However, in this developmental stage, we are confronted by great challenges.

We are unlikely to escape great sorrow for long. We all suffer, but not all of us grow. Those of us who grow do so by developing our moral imaginations and expanding our carrying capacities for pain and bliss. In fact, this pendulum between joy and despair is what makes old age catalytic for spiritual and emotional growth.

By our 70s, we have had decades to develop resilience. Many of us have learnt that happiness is a skill and choice. We do not need to look at our horoscopes to know how our day will go. We know how to create a good day.

We have learnt to look every day for humour, love and beauty. We have acquired an aptitude for appreciating life. Gratitude is not a virtue but a survival skill and our capacity for it grows with our suffering. That is why it is the least privileged, not the most, who excel in appreciating the smallest of offerings.

Many women flourish as we learn how to make everything workable. Yes, everything. As we walk out of a friend’s funeral, we can smell wood smoke in the air and taste snowflakes on our tongues.

Our happiness is built by attitude and intention. Attitude is not everything, but it is almost everything.

I visited the jazz great Jane Jarvis when she was old, crippled and living in a tiny apartment with a window facing a brick wall. I asked if she was happy and she replied: “I have everything I need to be happy right between my ears.”

We may not have control, but we have choices. With intention and focused attention, we can always find a forward path. We discover what we are looking for. If we look for evidence of love in the universe, we will find it. If we seek beauty, it will spill into our lives any moment we wish. If we search for events to appreciate, we discover them to be abundant.

There is an amazing calculus in old age. As much is taken away, we find

more to love and appreciate. We experience bliss on a regular basis.

One friend, when she was young, needed things like a hike to the top of a mountain to experience bliss. But now, she said: “I can feel it when I look at a caterpillar on my garden path.”

Older women have learnt the importance of reasonable expectations. We know that all our desires will not be fulfilled, that the world is not organised around pleasing us and that others, especially our children, are not waiting for our opinions and judgments.

We know that the joys and sorrows of life are as mixed together as salt and water in the sea. We do not expect perfection or even relief from suffering. A good book, a piece of homemade pie or a call from a friend can make us happy. As my aunt Grace put it: “I get what I want, but I know what to want.”

We can be kinder to ourselves as well as more honest and authentic. Our people-pleasing selves soften their voices and our true selves

speak more loudly and more often.

We don’t need to pretend to ourselves and others that we do not have needs. We can say no to anything we do not want to do. We can listen to our hearts and act in our own best interest. We are less angst-filled and more content, less driven and more able to live in the moment with all its lovely possibilities.

Many of us have a shelterbelt of good friends and long-term partners. There is a sweetness to 50-year-old friendships and marriages that cannot be described in language.

We know each other’s vulnerabilities, flaws and gifts; we have had our battles royal and yet are grateful to be together. A word or a look can signal so much meaning.

Lucky women are connected to a rich web of women friends. Those friends can be our emotional health insurance policies.

The only constant in our lives is change. But if we are growing in wisdom and empathy, we can take

the long view. We have lived through seven decades of American history, from presidents Harry Truman to Donald Trump.

I knew my great-grandmother and, if I live long enough, will meet my great-grandchildren. I will have known seven generations of family. I see where I belong in a long line of Scotch-Irish ancestors.

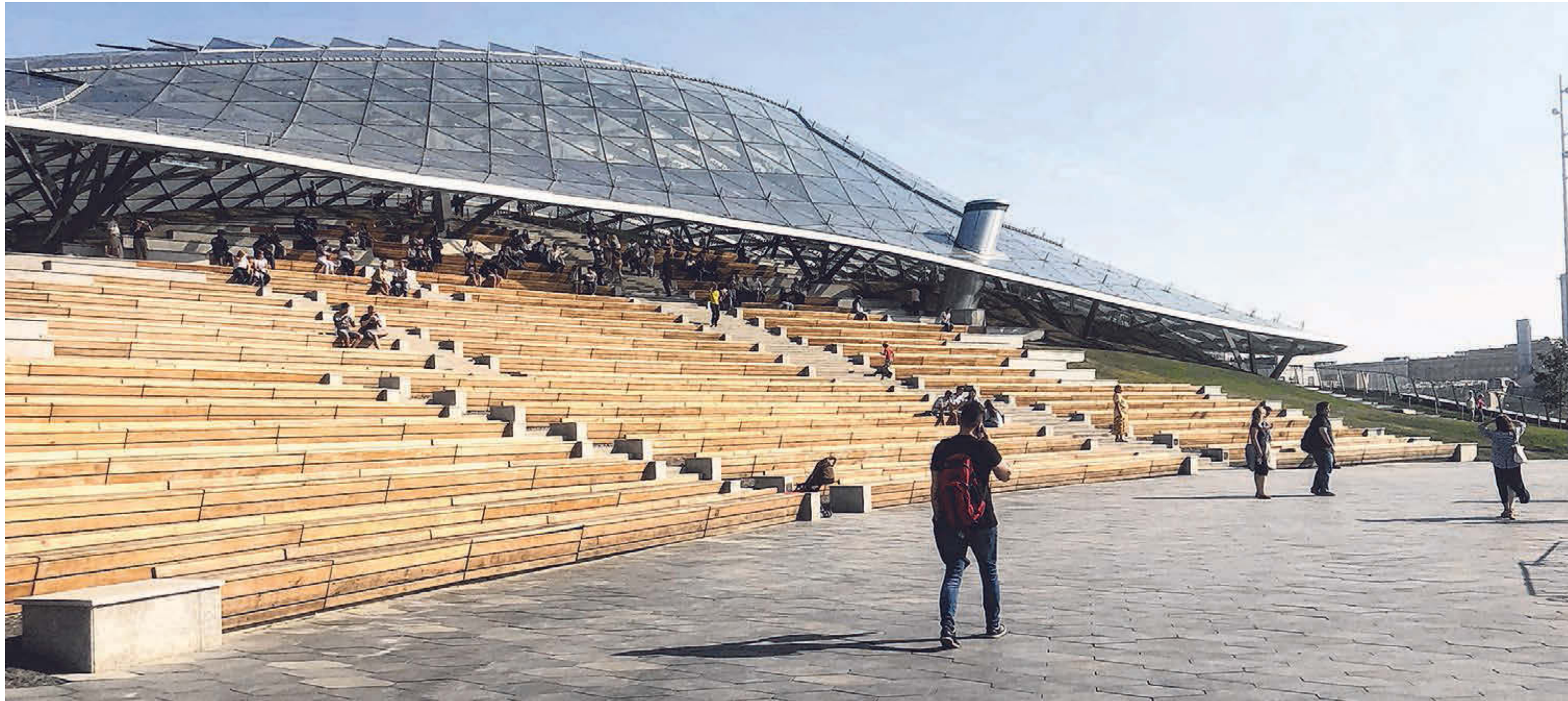
I am alive today only because thousands of generations of resilient homo sapiens managed to procreate and raise their children. I come from, we all come from, resilient stock, or we would not be here.

By the time we are 70, we have all had more tragedy and bliss in our lives than we could have foreseen. If we are wise, we realise that we are but one drop in the great river we call life and that it has been a miracle and a privilege to be alive.

NTIMES

• The writer is a clinical psychologist and the author of Women Rowing North: Navigating Life’s Currents And Flourishing As We Age.

Take a stroll along an amphitheatre (right) in Zaryadye Park, which opened in 2017.
ST PHOTOS: MELISSA HENG



Red October (right) is a former chocolate factory which has become an art and culture enclave.



Moscow's mix of old and new

There is more to the Russian capital than cathedrals and imperial structures – an undercurrent of creative culture runs through its streets



Melissa Heng

Before embarking on my first visit to Moscow, I envisioned the city to be filled with tall dome-topped cathedrals and imposing imperial structures with grandiose interiors – with the red-brick walls of the Kremlin, the official home of the Russian president, in the backdrop. While the Russian capital has all of the above, I was pleasantly surprised to find a younger undercurrent of creative culture running through its streets.

While there is no escaping from the historical architecture, which gives Moscow a scenic and respectable beauty, it also has an energetic exuberance that peeks out from every corner.

Walking through the streets, I find craft-beer bars and barber shops which house a cafe.

Artisanal markets sell locally produced cheese and jams, alongside rows of international food stalls offering everything from tacos to pho.

Boutiques carrying niche fashion brands sit alongside multi-label designer stores with artistic visual merchandising, reminiscent of the gallery-esque Dover Street Market in London.

I was in Moscow in September last year – autumn had just begun and the cool 19 deg C weather meant that many locals still travelled around on bicycles.

My guide, Anna, a 30-year-old Muscovite who has been living in the capital for most of her life, tells me that the city reached a turning point in 2013.

Before that, Moscow was seen as too expensive for many young people. But a series of urban redevelopments and a creative revolution led to the rise of affordable eateries, cinemas and beautiful parks, and the entry of high-street brands like Swedish fashion label H&M.

Much of the changes in the city's landscape were associated with Mr Sergei Kapkov, the minister of culture at the time. He resigned in 2015.

He pushed for changes in the city, such as more pedestrian walkways and cycling paths, that would cater to the needs of its middle class.

He also oversaw the redevelopment of Gorky Park (park-gorkogo.com/en), which was transformed from a ramshackle weed-strewn area to a world-class park with free Wi-Fi and bean bags to lounge on.

Besides structural changes, the citizens of Moscow changed as well. More, especially those under 30 years old, started travelling and brought back ideas, food and fashion trends from other countries.

Before, service standards were more brusque and functional, but as people became more exposed, they demanded a higher quality of service.

UPDATE ON CLASSIC FOOD

A food culture began to emerge. Chefs experimented with traditional Russian ingredients and recipes, putting spins on classic local produce to create modern fare.

Identical twin brothers and chefs Ivan and Sergey Berezutskiy own and run Twins Garden (twinsgarden.ru), a sleek set-up with stellar views of central Moscow, where we stop for lunch.

The twins take a farm-to-table approach, with more than half of the produce they use coming from their 5ha eco-farm in Kaluga, a city which is a two-hour drive south-west of Moscow. The rest of their ingredients come from other parts of Russia.

Though the brothers say they serve Russian cuisine, one will not find on the menu the usual borscht, a sour soup typically made from fermented beetroot juice; or beef stroganoff, a creamy sautéed beef dish.

Instead, we get fresh bread baked in a Russian oven, served with mushrooms and a herb sauce. This is paired with a light curd-like cheese made from goat's milk and served with a fragrant pesto.

For my main, I select a pike perch fillet with peaches, potato mousse and baby zucchini. The fish, caught by fishermen off the east coast of Russia, is perfectly cooked and unexpectedly meaty. The peaches add a refreshingly tangy flavour to the meal.

For dessert, the waiter recommends arctic raspberry, a sweet baked milk dessert. What comes to the table is an adorable bright pink dessert shaped like a large raspberry. The baked milk has a sugar coating that cracks lightly as we scoop into the dessert – almost like a creamy semifreddo.

The entire meal, whipped up using Russian-grown produce and modern culinary techniques, is a great introduction to Moscow's food scene. It cost about 1,400 rubles (\$28.60).

NATURE HOT SPOTS

For nature lovers, Gorky Park is not the only green area in Moscow.

The newer Zaryadye Park (www.zaryadyepark.ru/en), opened in 2017, is also a great spot to relax.

The public park is close to Red Square, Moscow's central city square, and its wide open spaces and gentle hills are home to more than 200 species of plants and two dozen species of trees.

The park also has a concert hall, an amphitheatre and a media centre. But its most iconic feature is a floating bridge that extends from the park out towards the Moskva River.

Another Moscow highlight which marries old and modern is Danilovsky Market (mytnaya-ulitsa-74.mskovo), a Soviet-era farmers' market that was revamped and gentrified in 2015.

It sits under a large dome structure and Anna says young and old come here to shop for groceries as well as enjoy a good brunch.

The market is neat and clean and the air smells like flowers, spices and freshly ground coffee. There are stalls with carts piled high with fruit, vegetables, nuts and spices.

Behind these are stalls selling fish, caviar and red meats. There are also smaller booths peddling artisanal cheese, preserved meats and honey.

A third of the market is taken up by a row of food stalls, where one can find almost every imaginable type of cuisine – from Greek tapas to Chinese noodles to French toast.

We stop at a cart where a woman sells kvas, a fermented drink made

from bread.

She pours me some from a tap and it looks like stout, with its dark colour and creamy foam on top.

Rather than bread, the kvas tastes like a sweet cider and reminds me of kombucha, an effervescent fermented tea.

I also try some churchkhela from a friendly stallholder giving out samples. The Armenian snack comprises nuts wrapped in a dried candy made from grape juice. Long strips of the snack hang on display at the stall.

Another shopkeeper offers me a taste of homemade elderberry jam.

He has about 10 types of flavoured jams, including blueberry and ginger, and after tasting one, I cannot help but try a few more. I end up buying a small jar of rhubarb jam to take home.

To end the day-long tour, Anna takes me to Strelka (strelka.com/en/na), a restaurant and bar by the Moskva River.

It is near the Red October (bit.ly/2ST7Cb9), a former chocolate factory which has become an art and culture enclave with galleries, designer ateliers, coffee shops selling cold brew and by-invite-only clubs.

When we reach Strelka, there is a photo shoot taking place near the entrance. Two models lean against the building's white brick walls as a photographer snaps away.

On the other side of the entrance, a group of four patrons play a leisurely game of table tennis.

It almost feels like I have walked onto a movie set.

Inside the restaurant, we walk up a flight of stairs to a wood-decked outdoor terrace with spacious seating under large white umbrellas.

We get a table facing the river, order drinks and snacks, and soak in the views as boats full of tourists sail by.

Across the river sits the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, an imposing structure along the horizon with its gleaming gold domes.

As the sun sets, this is perhaps an apt location to reflect on Moscow's mix of past and present, its old monuments and new creative hot spots.

melheng@sph.com.sg

The city has quite a few bars and cafes located discreetly underground, with only their entrance peeking out at ground level. (above).

• The writer's trip was hosted by Italian jewellery label Bulgari.

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THROUGH THE VALLEY

Celebrate the Art of Living and Leaving Well

The author, Dr William Wan, General Secretary of the Singapore Kindness Movement, will share his unique insights from his book, THROUGH THE VALLEY on how people can age gracefully.

He will be joined by The Straits Times Senior Correspondent Lee Siew Hui.

Central Public Library
100 Victoria Street
B1-Q1 Programme Zone
Wednesday, Feb 27, 2019
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Explore heritage near home

Asia is home to some of the world's oldest civilisations, as evidenced by the staggering number of Unesco World Heritage Sites in the region. According to Unesco, Asia and the Pacific have 181 cultural, 65 natural and 12 mixed World Heritage Sites. This makes up 23.6 per cent of the total, second to Europe and North America's 47.07 per cent. **Ong Sor Fern** shares some sites to check off your travel bucket list

Asian Legends

Bangladesh

World Heritage Sites: 3



PHOTOS: ST FILE

HISTORIC MOSQUE CITY OF BAGERHAT
The city of Bagerhat was founded in the 15th century by Khan Jahan Ali. It was lost for centuries, protected by the jungle which took back the city years after the death of its founder. It was rediscovered in 1895. It is an important example of

Muslim architecture, showing the sophistication of builders as they laid out mosques, mausoleums, bridges and water tanks. The buildings are constructed from baked bricks. The Shait Gumbad, or Sixty Dome Mosque (above), is one of 12 mosques and mausoleums on the site and one of the oldest mosques in Bangladesh.



THE SUNDARBANS
The Sundarbans mangrove forest covers 140,000ha and is one of the largest mangrove forests in the world. It borders Bagerhat and was cited for its Outstanding Universal Value. The forest is home to a wide range of fauna, including the estuarine crocodile, Indian python and endangered species such as the Bengal tiger.

India

World Heritage Sites: 37



RED FORT COMPLEX
Emperor Shah Jahan, the fifth Mughal ruler, was also a great builder. The Red Fort, an imposing palace, is a marvel of ancient engineering ingenuity. The private apartments are connected by a water channel, named rather poetically the Stream of Paradise, and baths were supplied with both hot and cold water. It is said that one of the fountains once spouted rose water.



CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI TERMINUS (FORMERLY VICTORIA TERMINUS)
This great Victorian Gothic monument in Mumbai took 10 years to construct. Designed by Frederick William Stevens, it has been in use for more than 130 years and, today, it sees more than three mil-

lion commuters every day. The design of the building, with its dome, turrets and pointed arches, makes references to Indian palace architecture, while the engineering and detailing of the building reflect Victorian technical prowess and ambition.

PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, UNESCO

Japan

World Heritage Sites: 22



HIMEJI-JO

Considered one of the prettiest castles in Japan, Himeji-jo is also the finest surviving example of early 17th-century castle architecture in the country. Built of wood, its white plastered earthen walls present an aesthetically pleasing exterior.

PHOTOS: HONG THAI TRAVEL SERVICE, JAPAN NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANISATION

HISTORIC VILLAGES OF SHIRAKAWA-GO AND GOKAYAMA

Nestled in a valley surrounded by high mountains, the villages of Shirakawa-go (right) and Gokayama feature Gassho-zukuri houses that earned them World Heritage status. These farmhouses feature steeply pitched thatched roofs that look like hands joined in prayer, hence the name



Gassho-zukuri, prayer-hands construction. The roofs are very strong and allow the houses to cope with the heavy winter snow.

Cambodia

World Heritage Sites: 3



ANGKOR WAT

The sprawling temple complex of Angkor Wat, spread over 400 sq km, is well known to Singaporeans. Built in the first half of the 12th century by King Suryavarman II, it is the best preserved architectural masterpiece from the Khmer kingdom, which ruled a large swath of Indochina from the seventh cen-

tury to the 12th century. At its height, Angkor Wat was the largest city in the world with an estimated one million inhabitants. The city was "rediscovered" in the 19th century by French naturalist Henri Mouhot, who published descriptions of the ancient city after an expedition with the British Royal Geographical Society.



PHOTOS: BELMOND LA RESIDENCE, D'ANGKOR, ST FILE

TEMPLE OF PREAH VIHEAR
A spectacular cliff-top temple dedicated to the Hindu god of Shiva, Preah Vihear had been the object of a territorial tussle between Cambodia and Thailand for nearly a hundred years. In 2013, the International Court of Justice in The Hague ruled that Thailand had to withdraw its troops from around the temple. The temple was cited as an exceptional example of Khmer architecture and is well preserved, thanks to its remote location.

Indonesia

World Heritage Sites: 8



BOROBUDUR TEMPLE COMPOUNDS

Built in the eighth and ninth centuries, Borobudur was a centre for Buddhist worship till between the 10th and 15th centuries, when it was abandoned.

KOMODO NATIONAL PARK

The biggest monitor lizards in the world inhabit these volcanic islands. There are some 5,700 komodo dragons on the islands, which are also home to other animals such as the orange-footed scrubfowl and the Timor deer.



PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, SILKAIR

It was rediscovered in the 19th century, restored in the 20th century and now attracts more tourists than Buddhist pilgrims. Visitors come to admire its architectural symmetry amid a serene forested landscape. Occupying more than

Malaysia

World Heritage Sites: 4



GUNUNG MULU NATIONAL PARK

Located in Borneo, Gunung Mulu National Park is cited for its biodiversity and karst features.

52,000ha, the park's plant life is particularly rich, with more than 3,500 species of vascular plants. Its karst landscape boasts a geological history dating back more than one million years.

KINABALU PARK

Spread over 75,000ha in Sabah, this park is dominated by Mount Kinabalu, the highest peak between the Himalayas and New Guinea. It is home to a wide range of habitats, from tropical lowlands to sub-alpine forest.



PHOTOS: BJORN OLESEN

South Korea

World Heritage Sites: 13



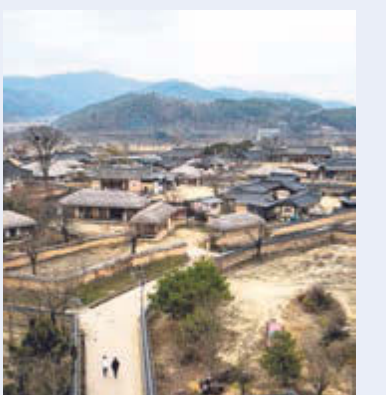
JONGMYO SHRINE

The oldest Confucian shrine in South Korea also houses the spirit tablets of rulers of the Joseon dynasty. Dating from the 16th century, the shrine still hosts ceremonies of ancestral worship today.

PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, NKTO

HISTORIC VILLAGES OF KOREA: HAHOE AND YANGDONG

Hahoe (right) and Yangdong are exemplars of traditional clan villages dating back to the Joseon era, with buildings set in beautiful natural landscapes. They are notable as they have preserved original buildings as well as folk traditions such as Hahoe's shamanistic mask dance.



Thailand

World Heritage Sites: 5



HISTORIC CITY OF AYUTTHAYA

Ayutthaya was the second capital of the Siamese kingdom and it flourished between the 14th and 18th centuries. Laid out in a strict grid format, the city is lo-

cated on an island surrounded by three rivers which connect it to the sea. This connectivity turned Ayutthaya into an important hub for both trade and diplomacy.

BAN CHIANG ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

This unprepossessing site is an oval-shaped earthen mound. But excavations have revealed that the site dates from 1,495BC and shows evidence of some of the earliest settled agrarian occupation in South-east Asia. There is evidence of wet rice agriculture and domestication of farm animals as well as signs of ceramic manufacture and bronze tool-making.



PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, TOURISM AUTHORITY OF THAILAND

The Philippines

World Heritage Sites: 6



RICE TERRACES OF THE PHILIPPINE CORDILLERAS

The beautiful sculpted slopes of the Cordilleras mountains are the product of two millennia of human occupation. The mountains were shaped by the Ifugao ethnic group, a minority community that has lived there for thousands of years.

PHOTOS: WORLD MONUMENT FUND, PHILIPPINE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

HISTORIC TOWN OF VIGAN

Located at the north-west tip of Luzon, this town was founded in 1572 by Spanish conquistador Juan de Salcedo. It was the northernmost settlement established by the Spanish and crucial to trade with China. The town is also a well-



preserved example of Spanish colonial town planning.

China

World Heritage Sites: 53

MAUSOLEUM OF THE FIRST QIN EMPEROR

Qin Shihuang's famous terracotta warriors are the star attraction at this mausoleum in Xi'an. There are nearly 200 pits containing thousands of statues which were buried to accompany the first emperor into the afterlife to unite China. The tomb was built in the third century BC and, besides soldiers, the complex - which contains more than 600 sites - also has terracotta horses as well as bronze chariots and weapons.



IMPERIAL PALACES OF THE MING AND QING DYNASTIES IN BEIJING AND SHENYANG

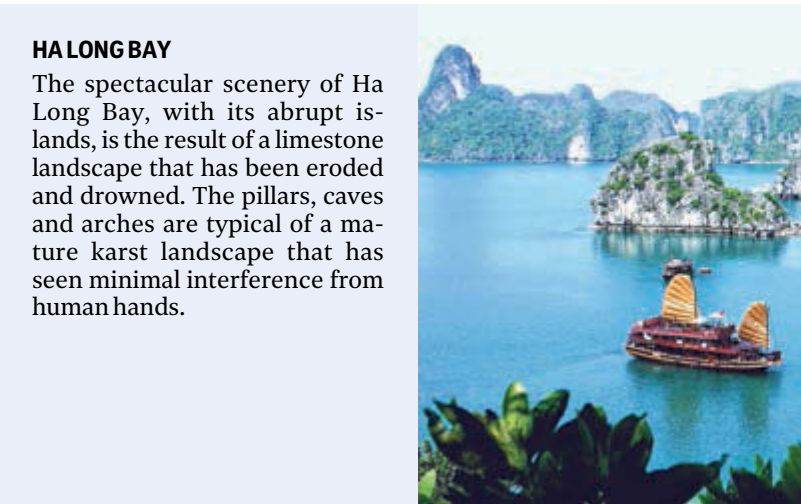
The Forbidden City in Beijing (right) and Houjia Palace in Shenyang were the seats of imperial power in China for 500 years. The Forbidden City was cited as "a priceless testimony to Chinese civilisation during the Ming and Qing dynasties". Houjia Palace, also known as Shenglin Palace, was a secondary capital and was built between 1625 and 1637 by Manchu leader Nurhaci for the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty.



PHOTOS: BIGFOTO.COM, MOKSIM SALEH

Vietnam

World Heritage Sites: 8



HA LONG BAY

The spectacular scenery of Ha Long Bay, with its abrupt islands, is the result of a limestone landscape that has been eroded and drowned. The pillars, caves and arches are typical of a mature karst landscape that has seen minimal interference from human hands.



HOI AN ANCIENT TOWN

The trading town of Hoi An contains Chinese, Japanese and Western influences in its architecture. Dating to the 15th century, the town features 1,107 well-preserved timber frame buildings, with brick or wooden walls, arranged in tight rows along narrow pedestrian streets. There is also a fine wooden Japanese bridge, with a pagoda on it, dating from the 16th century.

sorfern@sph.com.sg

PHOTOS: NAM HO TRAVEL, VIETJET



• This story was first published on StraitsTimes online. For a complete list of sites, go to www.straits-times.com/asia/unesco-world-heritage-sites-in-asia-and-south-east-asia

chewonitcomics.blogspot.com

chew on MARRIAGE

Dear, there's an online quiz for married couples to find out how much they know about each other. Let's try it.

LATER...

Oh no, it turns out that I don't know a lot of things about you.

That's okay, honey.

Phew, that means she also doesn't know about my secret stash of money.

That, I know about.

BABY BLUES™

BY RICK KIRKMAN & JERRY SCOTT

DRIVERLESS CARS CAN'T COME SOON ENOUGH, IF YOU ASK ME.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE TO BE LATE AGAIN! I'VE TOLD YOU TIME AND TIME AGAIN NOT TO WASTE MY WINDOW SEATS!

NO! BUT DOES IT SINK IN? NO! BECAUSE THE MINUTE I TURN MY BACK I FIND YOU BOTH DRIVING AWAY! I'VE BEEN DEESSED LONGEST!

OH, I'M GOING TO PUT UP WITH THIS KIND OF BEHAVIOR FOREVER!

PEANUTS

featuring "Good ol' Charlie Brown" by Schulz

DO YOU THINK IT'S POSSIBLE FOR SOMEONE TO BE IN LOVE AND NOT KNOW IT?

YOU MEAN ME, DON'T YOU?

YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT ME, AREN'T YOU? WHY DON'T YOU COME RIGHT OUT AND SAY IT? WHY DON'T YOU ADMIT IT?

WHY DON'T YOU JUST ASK ME IF I THINK IT'S POSSIBLE THAT I'M IN LOVE WITH YOU, AND I DON'T KNOW IT?

SCHROEDER, DO YOU THINK IT'S POSSIBLE THAT YOU'RE IN LOVE WITH ME, AND YOU DON'T KNOW IT?

NO!

LOVE DRIVES ME CRAZY!

SHERMAN'S LAGOON

BY JIM TOOMEY

HAPPY AS A CLAM. HMPH!

THAT'S WHAT I GET FOR BEING THE INTELLIGENT, SENSITIVE CREATURE I AM.

I THINK TOO MUCH.

MEANWHILE, YOU JUST SIT THERE WITHOUT A THOUGHT IN YOUR HEAD, HAPPY AS CAN BE!

NOT FAIR!

MAYBE I NEED TO LIGHTEN UP. MAYBE THIS CLAM CAN TEACH ME SOMETHING.

STOP TAKING LIFE SO SERIOUSLY. DO SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU HAPPY.

HERE'S A NICE RECIPE FOR CLAM CHOWDER.

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM, EAT 'EM.

garfield.com

Garfield

WE NOW GO TO A LIVE HELICOPTER SHOT OF THE RUNAWAY SNOW SACKER ON INTERSTATE 67...

CHEESE POODLER!

BREWSTER ROCKIT: SPACE GUY!

DR. MEL ROBOT PSYCHIATRIST

YOU GOTTA HELP ME, DOC! WHENEVER SOMEONE GIVES ME ADVICE, I FLY INTO A HOMICIDAL RAGE! WHAT SHOULD I DO?

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BY TIM RICKARD

Sudoku Pacific

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

6	1			9	3			4
				7			3	
					8			
		8						6
9			7	8	6			5
7						9		
			4					
	2			1				
1			6	3			7	9

2/17 DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Previous Puzzle Answer

9	2	6	3	4	7	8	5	1
7	8	4	2	1	5	9	3	6
1	3	5	8	6	9	4	7	2
6	7	3	9	5	4	1	2	8
2	4	9	1	8	3	7	6	5
8	5	1	6	7	2	3	9	4
3	6	2	4	9	1	5	8	7
4	9	7	5	2	8	6	1	3
5	1	8	7	3	6	2	4	9

Free to Air

CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (Variety)
7.00 The Dr Oz Show 8 (HD) (Info-Ed)
8.00 Talking Point 2018 (Current Affairs)
8.30 Wheel Of Fortune 35 (HD) (Variety)
9.30 Anjum's Spice Stories (HD) (Info-Ed)
10.00 Andre Rieu: Welcome To My World (Culture)
11.00 Lang Lang In Versailles (Culture)
PM
12.00 Meat And Greed 2 (HD) (Variety)
12.30 Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Cookery Course (HD) (Info-Ed)
1.00 America's Got Talent 12 (HD) (PG) (Variety)
3.00 Bruno Mars Presents 24K Magic Live At The Apollo (PG) (Variety)
4.00 Buzzing Hawks (Variety)
5.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (PG) (Variety)
5.30 Films & Stars (PG) (Variety)
6.00 Tricked (Canada) (PG) (Variety)
6.30 Independence Day: Resurgence (PG) (Movie)
9.00 News 5 (HD)
9.30 Wild City (CC) (Info-Ed)
10.30 Lip Sync Battle 4 (CC) (Variety)
11.00 Fear Factor MTV USA (PG) (Variety)
AM
12.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (PG13) (Info-Ed)
12.50 Plastic Surgery Is My Business (HD) (PG) (Info-Ed)
1.20 Andre Rieu: Welcome To My World (Culture)
2.20 Lang Lang In Versailles (Culture)
3.20 Lip Sync Battle 4 (CC) (Variety)
3.50 Tricked (Canada) (PG) (Variety)
4.20 Wheel Of Fortune 35 (HD) (Variety)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 8 (HD) (Info-Ed)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 Food Source 4 (HD) (Variety)
7.00 Portrait Of Home 2 (Drama)
9.00 Beijing Opera Cats 2 (Schoolkids)
9.30 New Doraemon (Schoolkids)
10.00 Little Incredible Explorer (Schoolkids)
10.30 Mark Your Calendar (Schoolkids)
11.00 Tuesday Report – The Dream Catchers (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.30 One Hundred Tastes Of Taiwan 2 (HD) (Info-Ed)
PM
12.00 Justice In The City (PG) (CC) (Drama)

2.00 City Foragers (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.30 Say It! (Variety)
3.30 Home Dining (CC) (Variety)
4.30 Beyond Words (PG) (CC) (Drama)
6.30 Singapore Today (HD) (News)
7.00 Spring Flower (PG) (CC) (Drama)
10.00 News Tonight (HD) (News)
10.30 Voyage Of Love (PG) (CC) (Drama)
11.00 Whispers Of The Dead (HD) (PG13) (Info-Ed)
11.30 The Best Of Food Source 3 (Variety)
AM
12.00 The Legend Of S (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.00 Unriddle 2 (PG) (Drama)
4.00 The Deer And The Cauldron (HD) (PG) (Drama)

CHANNEL U

AM
8.00 Home Shopping (Infomercial)
10.00 Perfect Match 3 (Variety)
PM
12.00 Rites Of Motherhood (CC) (Info-Ed)
12.30 Food Secrets (CC) (Info-Ed)
1.30 Come Dance With Me (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.00 Schools Unlimited (CC) (Info-Ed)
3.00 Golden Rainbow (PG) (CC) (Drama)
5.00 Mrs Cop (PG) (CC) (Drama)
7.00 Sound Of My Dream 2 (Variety)
9.00 The Entertainer (PG) (CC) (Drama)
11.00 News Tonight (News)
11.30 Sound Of My Dream 2 (Variety)
AM
1.30 Lord Of Shanghai (PG) (CC) (Drama)
2.30 Close

CHANNEL NEWSASIA

AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
6.30 Correspondents' Diary
7.00 News Now
7.30 Asia Business First Weekend
8.00 News Now
8.30 Market Insights
9.00 News Now
9.30 This Weekend
10.02 Conversation With
10.30 Super Octogenarians
11.00 News Now
11.30 Correspondents' Diary
PM
12.00 News Now
12.30 Asia Business First Weekend
1.02 Japan Hour (English Subtitles)
2.00 News Now

2.30 Money Mind
3.00 News Now
4.02 Conversation With
4.30 Super Octogenarians
5.00 News Now
5.30 Asia Business First Weekend
6.00 News Now
6.30 Correspondents' Diary
7.02 Once A Refugee (CC)
7.30 This Weekend (CC)
8.00 Primetime Asia
8.30 Asia Business First Weekend
9.02 Blueprint For Survival (CC)
10.00 Singapore Tonight
10.30 On The Red Dot – Risky Business (CC)
11.02 Trump's Showdown
AM
12.00 News Now
12.30 This Weekend
1.02 Asia Business First Weekend
1.30 On The Red Dot – Risky Business (CC)
2.00 News Now
2.30 Money Mind
3.02 Conversation With
3.30 Super Octogenarians
4.00 News Now
4.30 Once A Refugee
5.02 Blueprint For Survival
Programmes may be pre-empted by breaking news

VASANTHAM

PM
1.00 Vettah (PG) (Movie)
4.00 Mouna Raagam (PG) (CC) (Movie)
7.00 OK Kanmani (Schoolkids)
7.30 Ha Ha Ha Sirippu 2018 (Variety)
8.00 Vera Level (HD) (CC) (Info-Ed)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Maan Karate (PG) (CC) (Movie)
AM
12.00 Tamil Seithi (R) (News)
12.30 Close

OKTO

AM
7.00 Floogals (Preschool)
8.00 Sesame Street (HD) (Preschool)
9.00 OddBods (Schoolkids)
9.30 Tobot (HD) (Schoolkids)
10.00 Future Card Buddyfight Ace (Schoolkids)
10.30 CardFight!! Vanguard (HD) (Schoolkids)
11.00 Lego Ninjago 9 – Hunted (HD) (Schoolkids)
11.30 Extreme Football (HD) (Schoolkids)

PM
12.00 Basic Mini-tary Training (Schoolkids)
12.30 Museum Mysteries (Schoolkids)
1.00 Loud House (Schoolkids)
1.30 Jane And The Dragon (Schoolkids)
2.00 Inazuma Eleven (Schoolkids)
2.30 The Deep (HD) (Schoolkids)
3.00 Future Card Buddyfight (Schoolkids)
3.30 CardFight!! Vanguard G: Next (HD) (Preschool)
4.00 Bear Grylls Survival School (HD) (Schoolkids)
4.30 Loud House (Schoolkids)
5.00 Jane And The Dragon (Schoolkids)
5.30 Inazuma Eleven (Schoolkids)
6.00 Totally Totto (HD) (Schoolkids)
6.30 Exlosers 2 (Drama)
7.00 The Deep (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
7.30 Future Card Buddyfight (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
8.00 CardFight!! Vanguard G: Next (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
8.30 Bear Grylls Survival School (HD) (CC) (Schoolkids)
9.00 Ninja Warrior (PG) (CC) (Variety)
9.30 Perfection (CC) (Sports)
10.00 Max Muay Thai: Ultimate Muay Thai (HD) (PG13) (Sports)
PM
12.00 Close

SURIA

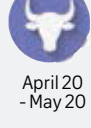
AM
10.00 Atuk PhD (Drama)
11.00 Solo (CC) (Info-Ed)
PM
12.00 Balik Sekolah (Drama)
12.30 Suami Tanpa Cinta (HD) (Drama)
1.30 Demi Cinta (CC) (Info-Ed)
2.00 Isteri Tuan Ihsan (Drama)
3.00 Ye Ke?! (CC) (Variety)
4.00 Meh Sandar Pada Aku (HD) (PG) (Drama)
5.00 Setia Menunggumu (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 Skuad Cilik (CC) (S)
6.30 Alah Abang, Amboi Kakak (PG) (CC) (Info-Ed)
7.00 The Project (CC) (Info-Ed)
7.30 Jalan-Jalan Makan Angin (CC) (IE)
8.00 Berita (HD) (News)
8.30 Wahhnnita (Info-Ed)
9.30 Rahsia Hati Perempuan (PG) (CC) (Drama) (Debut)
10.30 The Streets 2 (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.00 Juang Seorang Usahawan (CC) (Info-Ed)
11.30 Berita (HD) (R) (News)
AM
12.00 Close

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singtelv.com.sg.

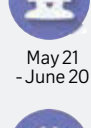
Horoscope



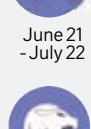
March 21
- April 19



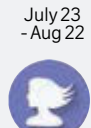
April 20
- May 20



May 21
- June 20



June 21
- July 22



July 23
- Aug 22



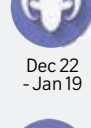
Aug 23
- Sept 22



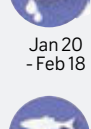
Sept 23
- Oct 22



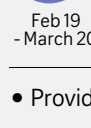
Oct 23
- Nov 21



Nov 22
- Dec 21



Dec 22
- Jan 19



Jan 20
- Feb 18



Feb 19
- March 20

Make sure you are moving as much as you can. Things are developing and you need to be in the thick of it all. Your great energy helps you to make the most of every opportunity.

You have to let people be themselves, no matter how ridiculous they get. Your tolerance should pay off as at least one of them will bust out with a new idea that saves the day.

You are feeling light, breezy and carefree, but you may be the only one. If you need to go off by yourself and just let others stew, so be it. You do not have to come down to their level.

Get big and crazy – the more outrageous, the better. Sometimes you need to really let go before you can feel right about yourself and your people, so blow off that steam.

You need to revel in whatever good stuff comes your way, though a little sharing might be in order. Your amazing, positive energy helps you to coast through events like a bobsled.

You are not nearly as organised as you wish you were, but that can change. You just need to take a moment to refocus your energy and you should then find at least one new way to take care of business.

People want answers and you have them. Your wisdom is in high demand, so you can expect to be the go-to person for everyone from co-workers to kids.

Your working life is going through changes and you need to make sure that you are paying attention. It may be a good idea for you to think about making a move, but you need to bide your time.

Take a little risk if you can afford it. Your energy is great and while there are never any guarantees in life, you can feel confident that things are more likely to go your way.

You have to make an important decision – one that is sure to displease a friend or colleague. They may feel more deserving of your time, but you have to do what you have to do.

Your creative powers are well-known, but the day brings a new kind of playfulness – and also seriousness – to your work. It is a good time to fight for your creative vision. There will be dissension.

You are a bit overwhelmed by all the business that is coming in, which is both good and bad. You may have to defer some of your favourite people until you have some room to breathe.

• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
6.40 Pawn Stars 18
7.05 Storage Wars 11
7.35 The Pickers 9
8.30 Counting Cars 7
9.30 The Tesla Files
10.25 History Drama: Project Blue Book
11.20 Ancient Aliens 10
PM
12.15 The Curse Of Oak Island 5
1.10 The Curse Of Civil War Gold
2.05 Counting Cars 7
3.00 Head To Head
3.30 The Curse Of Oak Island 5
4.25 Ancient Aliens 10
5.20 History Drama: Project Blue Book
6.15 The Pickers 12
7.10 Rising Sun Over Malaya
8.05 Forged In Fire 5
9.00 Forged In Fire: Knife Or Death
9.55 Days That Shaped America
10.50 The Rise And Fall Of Pablo Escobar

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
6.00 Bring It! 2
7.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
PM
12.00 Married At First Sight Australia 4
3.00 Drink, Lay, Love
4.35 Seatbelt Psychic
5.00 Born This Way 2
6.00 Tiny House Nation
7.00 Gok's Fill Your House For Free
8.00 Little Women: Terra's Big House
9.00 Project Runway: Fashion Startup
10.00 Four Christmases And A Wedding
11.35 Hoarders 9

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
6.00 Mr Woodcock (NC16)
7.30 Jimmy Neutron, Boy Genius
8.50 Failure To Launch
10.25 Transformers: The Last Knight (NC16)
PM
1.00 Ready Player One (NC16)
3.15 Robin Hood
5.30 Lilo & Stitch
6.55 King Arthur: Legend Of The Sword (NC16)

9.00 Rampage (NC16)
10.45 True Detective 3 (NC16)
11.45 Body Of Lies
AM
1.45 There Will Be Blood
4.20 Modern Life Is Rubbish

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
6.30 61*
8.35 Coach Carter
10.50 Atomica
PM
12.15 Entrapment (NC16)
2.10 Red (NC16)
4.00 Get Smart's Bruce And Lloyd Out Of Control
5.10 The Game Plan
7.00 Painkiller Jane
8.20 The Last Boyscout (NC16)
10.00 Driven
11.55 The Amityville Horror (M18)
AM
1.25 Watchmen (NC16)
3.55 Killing Hasselhoff (M18)
5.15 You Don't Know Jack (NC16)

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
7.45 Happy Camp 2 (HD)
9.30 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 4 (HD)
10.30 Momo's Paradise 4 (HD)
11.00 Pleasant Goat And Big Big Wolf – Flying Island: The Sky Adventure (HD)
11.30 Young Travellers' Survival Handbook (HD)
PM
12.00 Follow Me 8 (HD)
12.30 Perfect Match 6 (HD)
2.00 Maritime Silk Road
3.00 Familiar Taste (HD)
4.30 Taste Taiwan 3 (HD)
5.00 Liao Zhai 4 (HD)
7.00 Stay Healthy Stay Happy 4 (HD)
8.00 I Am The Actor (HD)
10.00 Sweet Dreams (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
6.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
7.00 ISU Four Continents Figure Skating Championships 2019: Ice Dance Free Dance
10.00 ISU Four Continents Figure Skating Championships 2019: Gala Exhibition
PM
12.30 Tennis: ATP Champions Tour 2018
1.00 Tennis: Deuce 2019
1.30 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered 2019
2.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018

3.00 Tennis: ATP 500 ABN Amro World Tennis Tournament: Day 6 Semi-finals
7.00 Snooker: 2018 World Open Finals Highlights
10.30 ATP 500 ABN Amro World Tennis Tournament : Day 7 Finals

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
6.00 Football: Coppa Italia 2018/19 Quarter-finals Inter Milan vs Lazio
9.00 Football: EFL League One 2018 Matchday 33 Southend Vs Portsmouth (Same Day Delayed)
11.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
11.30 Basketball: National Basketball League Round 18 Melbourne United Vs Perth Wildcats (Live)
PM
1.30 Marathon Xiamen Marathon 2019 Highlights
2.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
3.00 Basketball: Asean Basketball League 2018/19 Formosa Dreamers Vs Westports Malaysia Dragons (Live)
5.00 Wrestling: Wrestling: WWE Afterburn (PG)
5.55 Rugby: HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series 2018/19 Round 3 Hamilton Day 2 Finals Match 44
6.30 Rugby: HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series 2018/19 Round 3 Hamilton Day 2 Finals Match 45
7.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
8.00 Basketball: Asean Basketball League 2018/19 San Miguel Alab Pilipinas Vs Zhuhai Wolf Warriors (Live)
10.00 Basketball: National Basketball League Round 18 Melbourne United Vs Perth Wildcats

AM
12.00 Wrestling: Wrestling: WWE Afterburn (PG)
1.00 Basketball: Asean Basketball League 2018/19 CLS Knights Indonesia Vs Mono Vampire Basketball Club
3.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
3.30 Rugby: HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series 2018/19 Round 4 Sydney: Matches 1 To 4
5.00 Rugby: HSBC World Rugby Sevens World Series 2018/19 Round 4 Sydney: Matches 5 To 8

HUB SPORTS 3 (CHANNEL 204)

AM
8.30 Golf: The Skill Code 2019
9.00 Golf: Morning Drive 2018
11.00 Golf: Asian Tour 2019: ISPS Handa World Super 6 Perth Day 4
PM
5.00 Golf: Sunshine Tour 2019: Cape Town Open Highlights
6.00 Golf: Asian Tour 2019: ISPS Handa World Super 6 Perth Day 4

Singtel TV

DISCOVERY (HD) (CHANNEL 202)

AM
6.35 Gold Rush 9
7.25 How To Build... Everything
7.50 The Mind Control Freaks
8.15 Nasa's Unexplained Files
9.05 Wheeler Dealers 14
9.55 Speed Is The New Black 2
10.45 How Do They Do It? 15
11.35 Incredible Engineering Blunders: Fixed
PM
12.25 A Crime To Remember 4
4.35 The Perfect Murder 5
5.25 Gold Rush 9
6.15 Jeremy Wade's Mighty Rivers
7.10 Ed Stafford: First Man Out
8.05 Pandamonium
9.00 Revealed: The Throne Of Perak, Malaysia
9.55 Ed Stafford: First Man Out
10.50 Running Wild With Bear Grylls 4
11.45 The Perfect Murder 5

TLC (HD) (CHANNEL 254)

AM
6.35 Zumbo's Just Desserts
7.25 90 Day Fancy 6
9.05 Outdaughtered 3
9.55 Buddy's Big Bakedown
10.45 Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party 2
11.35 Bizarre Foods With Andrew Zimmern 10
PM
12.25 Dr Pimple Popper
1.15 A Taste Of Hong Kong 2
2.05 The Little Couple 9
2.55 Foodie Duo 3
3.45 Jamie & Jimmy's Food Fight Club 5
4.35 Say Yes To The Dress 16
5.25 What If We Get Married?
6.15 Separated At Birth
7.10 Outdaughtered 3
8.05 Dr Pimple Popper
9.00 Foodie Duo 3
9.55 Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party 2
10.50 Buddy's Big Bakedown
11.45 United States Of Burgers

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

AM
6.00 Criminal Minds: Suspect Behavior
7.50 Seal Team 2
8.45 Supernatural 14
9.40 Asia's Got Talent 3
11.05 Team Ninja Warrior 2
PM
12.55 Hawaii Five-0 9
1.45 The Amazing Race 29
4.30 Instinct
5.20 Cannon On Camera With Nick Cannon 2
6.10 MacGyver 3

7.00 Seal Team 2
7.50 The Blacklist 6
8.40 Hawaii Five-0 9
9.30 Asia's Got Talent 3
10.55 Bad Boys

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

AM
6.00 The Carbonaro Effect 2
10.10 The Big Bang Theory 9
10.55 Almost Genius
PM
12.35 Blended
2.40 The Big Bang Theory 11
3.05 Lethal Weapon 3
3.55 Arrow 7
4.45 Sucker Punch
6.45 The Intern
9.00 Green Lantern
11.05 Arrow 7
11.55 Lethal Weapon 3

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

AM
6.00 The Daily Show 24
7.15 Just For Laughs Gags 14
8.05 Super Ultimate Candid Camera
8.30 Mr Bean
9.30 Brotherhood
10.25 Lip Sync Battle 4
11.20 Saturday Night Live 44
PM
12.25 Lip Sync Battle 4
12.50 Corporate
2.25 Sir Patrick Stewart: A Knight Of Comedy
3.15 The Comedy Jam
4.05 Jane Krakowski: Get Happy
4.45 Detroiters
5.35 Amazingness
6.20 Comedy Central Roast Of Donald Trump
7.25 Idiotsitter
8.10 The Jim Jefferies Show
9.00 Howie Mandel All Star Comedy Gala
10.30 Hasan Minhaj Goat Face
11.15 Inside Amy Schumer 2
11.35 50 Central

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

AM
6.00 Stylish Man
7.00 The Legend Of Golden Music
8.00 Glorious World
8.30 The Golden Melodies 2018
10.00 All Out Of Love
PM
12.00 Stylish Man
1.00 The Golden Melodies 2018
2.30 All Out Of Love
4.30 The Legend Of Golden Music
5.30 Glorious World
6.00 Stylish Man
7.00 All Out Of Love
9.00 Super Nightclub
10.30 Top Singers

VIDEO ON DEMAND

1 The Oath (HD+) (Latest)
2 The Monkey King 2 (Mandarin)
3 Kasut Ku Kusut (Cine Ekspres)
4 Silukkuvarpatti Singam (Kollywood)
5 Kaala Hindi (Bollywood)
Programmes available anytime on demand

MIO STADIUM (HD) (CHANNEL 102)

AM
6.00 PL 18/19 Netbusters
6.30 PL 18/19 MOTW
8.30 Goals Of The Season 01/02
9.30 PL 18/19 MOTW
11.30 PL 18/19 Netbusters
PM
12.00 PL 18/19 Fantasy Premier League
12.30 PL 18/19 Premier League World
1.00 Review Of The Season 17/18
3.00 PL 18/19 Premier League World
3.30 PL 18/19 Netbusters
4.00 PL 18/19 Fantasy Premier League
4.30 PL 18/19 MOTW
6.30 Goals Of The Season 13/14
7.30 PL 18/19 MOTW
9.30 PL 18/19 Premier League World
10.00 PL 18/19 Netbusters
10.30 PL 18/19 Fantasy Premier League
11.00 PL 18/19 Review (Monday)
AM
12.00 Classic Match West Ham Vs Liverpool 10/11
2.00 Classic Match Leicester City Vs West Ham 14/15
4.00 Classic Match Manchester City Vs Newcastle 14/15

ST+news with benefits

Rewards for STsubscribers



Photo: Feld Entertainment Inc.

WIN Free tickets to Disney On Ice!

Disney on Ice will be skating into Singapore again from 20 to 24 March for a special show commemorating Mickey Mouse's 90th year. Disney on Ice presents Mickey's Super Celebration will feature characters from beloved Disney movies such as Steamboat Willie, Toy Story, Frozen, Inside Out and Moana. This colourful and high-energy ice extravaganza is quality entertainment for the family and should not be missed!

SPH subscribers have six chances to win free passes to Mickey's Super Celebration! One lucky subscriber will get a set of four Magical Moment Packages which includes seats in the first row, priority entrance access, an early merchandise shopping opportunity, VIP lanyards and posters and a post-show meet-and-greet session with the stars of the show!

Two other subscribers will win four VVIP tickets to the opening show, and get to enjoy the kids' ride during a segment of the show. One kid from each family will be eligible for the kids' ride. While another three subscribers will stand a chance to win four VVIP tickets to the opening show. To enter the draw, simply follow these steps:

- 1) Look for the Rewards section in the SPH Rewards App
- 2) Click on the "JOIN" button to participate

Terms and conditions apply.



Photo: Wan Hao Chinese Restaurant, All pictures shown are for illustration purpose only

Cloudy Bay Presents The Exquisite Treasures Of Wan Hao Chinese Restaurant

Singapore Marriott Tang Plaza Hotel's award-winning Wan Hao Chinese Restaurant is now newly re-opened after a phase of major refurbishments.

To celebrate its re-opening, Cloudy Bay Winery and Wan Hao Chinese Restaurant are bringing to you a specially designed dinner event, complete with exquisite food and wine pairing.

Diners can expect signature favourites like their Double-Boiled Superior Soup and Tea Smoked Wagyu Beef with King Mushroom, to be accompanied by the sophistication of Cloudy Bay Wines; Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc, Cloudy Bay Chardonnay, Cloudy Bay Tekoko and Cloudy Bay Pinot Noir.

Helming Wan Hao Chinese Restaurant's kitchen is Executive Chef Brian Wong. With more than 15 years of culinary expertise from his stint at notable restaurants that spans across Europe to Asia, this award-winning chef's skills are unquestionable.

Thus, clear your calendar for 28 February 2019. Chef's selection of Canapés paired with Sauvignon Blanc will be served at the reception at 7pm.

Dinner will start formally at 7.30pm with a short speech by the Chef and winery representative. This exclusive one-night dinner event is a gastronomic experience not to be missed.

SPH subscribers get to enjoy a special rate of \$174.20 nett (Usual Price: \$233.05).

To purchase your tickets, simply visit <https://www.gevme.com/wanhao>. Tickets will be on sale from 7 February to 25 February 2019. Menu and pairing details are accurate as of 31 January 2019.



Photo: Darlie

Festive Beauty Hacks

Did you know that a bright smile and pristine white teeth is key to a dazzling look? Here are some ways how a bright smile can complement your outfit and brighten up your make up for the day.

A dazzling white smile is the greatest complement to your choice of lip colour. Your sparkling smile helps you to rock any colour choice of eye shadow; you can now go bold with blue, pink purple and even red.

A white smile can enhance the effect of your make up bronzer and give you higher

and sexier cheekbones. Pick up some bronzer powder with a large fluffy brush, brush it on your cheekbones, temple and jawline and see the results instantaneously.

Darlie All Shiny White Supreme Whitening toothpaste has a Q10 formulation that prevents future stain buildup by 90%. It has three times advanced whitening factors, which helps to actively fight against stubborn teeth stains, and regains whiteness in your smile. Amp up your smile and start using Darlie in your daily routine today!

To help you get started, Darlie is giving away 40 hampers worth more than \$45. To stand a chance to win, simply follow the following steps:

- 1. Download the SPH Rewards app.
- 2. Look for the contest in the "rewards" section and click on the "JOIN" button to participate.

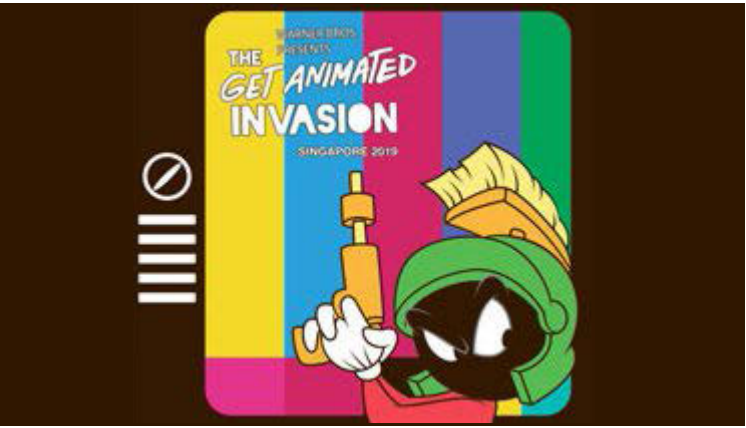


Photo: Looney Tunes

Calling Out To All Looney Tunes Fans!

The "Get Animated Invasion" by Warner Bros. Consumer Products (WBCP), an unprecedented charity initiative launched in Raffles City Singapore from 13 Feb 3 Mar 2019. Walk through a gallery of Marvin The Martian figurines designed by well-known designers, artists, influencers and personalities such as Aaron Kwok, Michele Reis, Kevin & Grace, Fann Wong, Li Nanxing, Mark Lee, Nick Shen, Constance Lau, Korean Celebrity Amber Liu and many more!

Support and make a difference! Figurines exhibited will be auctioned off with 100% of the proceeds going to Make-A-Wish® International charity foundation. For more info on the online auction, please visit: <https://getanimatedxmakeawish.opf.hk>

From 17 Feb to 3 Mar, 300 free Looney Tunes products worth \$20 will be given away to SPH subscribers who visit the Get Animated Invasion Tour at Raffles City! Limited to the first 100 subscribers per week. Characters merchandise such as washi tapes, table mats, notebooks, table mat, drawstring bags, cleaning cloths and coasters are available for grabs!

SPH direct subscribers can access our exclusive Rewards App to enjoy special deals and privileges. Simply download our 'SPH Rewards' app from the App Store or Google Play.

Interested merchants, email rewards@sph.com.sg for more information.

Top 5: Old-school eats

Old-school flavours

These old-school eats may have been around for decades, but they are still popular



Wong Ah Yoke
Senior Food Correspondent



1 FISH HEAD CURRY FROM SAMY'S CURRY

Where: 25 Dempsey Road, tel: 6472-2080
Open: 11am to 3pm, 6 to 10pm daily

Samy's Curry was already a Dempsey institution way before the former army barracks were converted into a food and beverage and lifestyle enclave in 2007. It started as a roadside stall in Tank Road in 1963, but by the 1980s, it had moved to Dempsey where it was set up as a canteen-like eatery with no air-conditioning. I remember going with colleagues in the mid-1980s and enjoying the delicious South Indian dishes.

When you sat down, a banana leaf was placed in front of you and the wait staff took turns to come around with the rice and dishes to pile on the leaf. If we went in a group, we would order the fish head curry.

Now there is an air-conditioned room at the back, but you still eat on banana leaves.

The fish head curry, too, is as good as I remember it. A small portion costs \$21 and is enough to feed three or four persons. A large serving is \$33.

The fish head is meaty and fresh, and comes in a delicious curry simmered with vegetables such as ladies' fingers and eggplant. The curry is aromatic, slightly tart and not very fiery. And there's no coconut milk, so it is light enough to drink. The best thing to do, however, is to eat it with loads of steaming rice.



2 AYAM BAKAR FROM WARUNG NASI PARIAMAN

Where: 738 North Bridge Road, tel: 6292-2374
Open: 7.30am to 3pm daily

When I lived in Jalan Sultan a decade ago, I would walk past Warung Nasi Pariaman on most mornings after my exercise session at a gym in Bugis.

And the display of dishes in its glass window by the five-foot-way would be so tempting that I often packed home rice with a piece of ayam bakar, sambal goreng and a fried egg – putting back all the calories I expended during the workout.

Since then, the corner shop has been renovated and the food counter has been moved inside, probably for hygiene reasons.

But the cooking at the 71-year-old stall is still as good, with the ayam bakar (Malay for grilled chicken) a standout.

The chicken leg (\$6) is marinated with spices, then grilled over charcoal and served in a spicy gravy thickened with coconut milk.

The meat is full of flavour, with a hint of smokiness, and tender enough to come off the bone easily. And the gravy tastes wonderful with rice.

If the server asks if you want chili with your rice, say yes. You get a generous complimentary spoonful of sambal that will set your mouth on fire, but it is absolutely delicious. Eat it with everything, but never on its own.

3 MURTABAK FROM ZAM ZAM

Where: 697 North Bridge Road, tel: 6298-6320
Open: 7am to 11pm daily

Whenever I crave a murtabak, the place I think of is Zam Zam. The Muslim restaurant, which opened in 1908, is still going strong and draws crowds every day.

The menu offers items such as biryani and Indian-Muslim dishes such as chicken masala, beef mysore and mee goreng. But murtabak is what I usually order.

It comes with different fillings, including sardine (from \$5) and even deer meat (from \$10), which I have not had the nerve to try.

I usually go for chicken (from \$6), but beef (from \$5) and mutton (from \$6) are good too, if you don't mind the tougher textures and stronger flavours.

The centre of the murtabak is bursting with a generous amount of shredded chicken breast cooked with onion slices in spices.

There is no filling at the edges, but these are nice and crispy, and delicious with the accompanying curry gravy. So it is like having two dishes in one – chicken murtabak in the middle and egg prata at the sides.

Each order includes a side dish of ketchup-drenched cucumber slices, which are perfect for putting out the fire in your mouth from the spicy chicken.



4 CURRY PUFF FROM OLD CHANG KEE

Where: 88 outlets island-wide, various opening times

First sold in a coffee-shop stall in Mackenzie Road in 1956, this curry puff, now named Curry 'O, has not had its recipe changed despite the business being sold to a new owner in 1986 and expanded to 88 outlets, many of them in malls. It also has an outpost in London's Covent Garden where a curry puff sells for £2.80 (\$\$4.90) each.

In Singapore, it costs a more affordable \$1.50 and comes plump with a filling of potatoes and pieces of chicken thigh cooked in a curry spice blend. A slice of hard-boiled egg is also tucked under the crisp and buttery flaky crust.

What I like is that it is not oily and has just enough fire to tantalise but not burn. And it is consistently good, perhaps a result of being made at a central kitchen.

A blind tasting organised by The Straits Times in 2015 found it to be among the best out of 41 brands of curry puffs tested.



PHOTOS: WONG AH YOE, LIANHE ZAOBAO, OLD CHANG KEE, SPRING COURT



5 HOKKIEN POPIAH FROM SPRING COURT

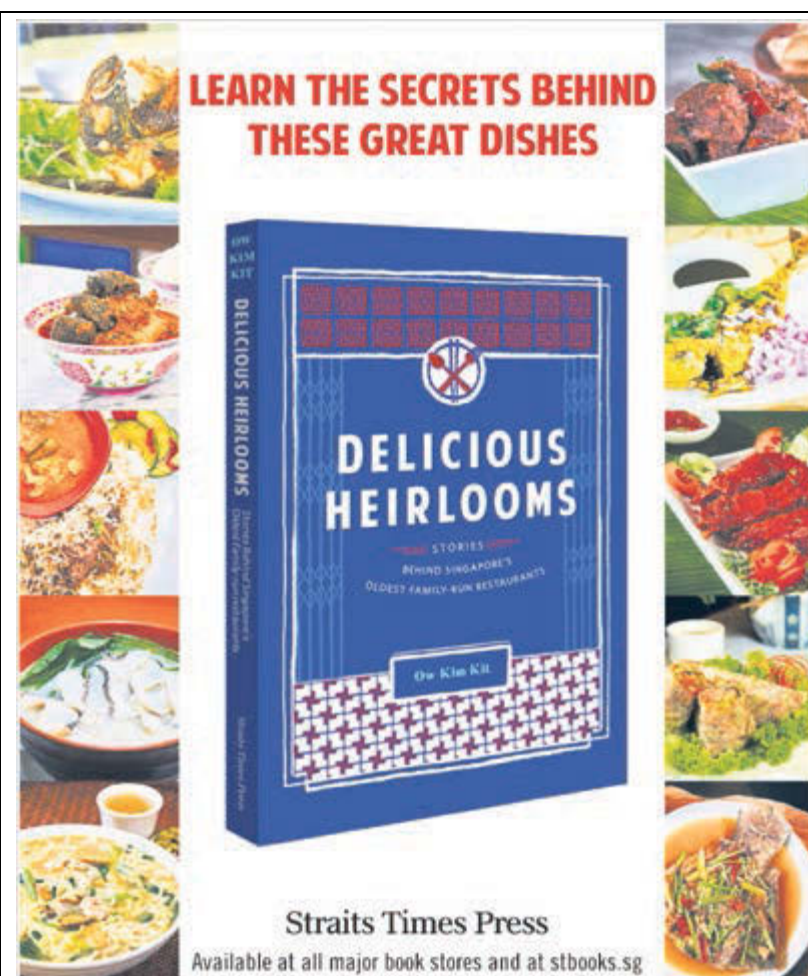
Where: 52-56 Upper Cross Street, tel: 6449-5030
Open: 11am to 3pm, 6 to 10.30pm daily

This Chinese restaurant started in the long-defunct Great World Amusement Park in 1929, but this dish was introduced by current owner Soon Puay Keow, 76, in 2006.

The recipe for the popiah (\$7.80), however, dates back further. It was a dish that her late mother, who hailed from Xiamen in China, used to make for family gatherings.

Unlike popiah sold at most eateries here, shredded cabbage is the main ingredient instead of jicama (bangkwang). This is cooked with other vegetables such as carrot in a superior stock made with pork bones and dried sole until they get soft and sweet. Then it is wrapped in a popiah skin with more ingredients, including chopped prawn, seaweed, fried tau kwa and shredded omelette.

Altogether, more than 10 ingredients go into the roll, giving this popiah a wider girth than the norm. When you bite into it, the many flavours and textures make you appreciate the effort that goes into it.



Get a taste of heritage

Feast on heirloom dishes, British-Hainanese specials and Burmese food by a baker at Asian Masters



Eunice Quek
Food Correspondent

While foodies in Singapore are ever hungry for the next new eatery, there are plenty of culinary institutions here that regulars flock to.

While new restaurants barely survive a year in the competitive dining scene here, some legends have endured multiple generations.

The upcoming epicurean extravaganza Asian Masters showcases some of these old-school establishments, such as 90-year-old Chinese restaurant Spring Court and 50-year-old Teochew Restaurant Huat Kee.

Diners can also look forward to British-Hainanese dishes at Violet On Singapore in Ion Orchard and fine Malay cuisine by chef-consultant Aziza Ali, who pioneered Malay fine dining in Singapore.

These culinary doyens are featured alongside interesting additions such as a supper event at JB Ah Meng in Geylang; a home-dining experience by make-up artist Tinoq Russell Goh; and Burmese dishes by cookbook author Bryan Koh of cake

company Chalk Farm.

While the main dining events run from March 1 to April 3, the year-long festival runs till Feb 29 next year and includes dining and cocktail promotions.

On April 1, the dining festivities culminate at the invite-only The Straits Times and Lianhe Zaobao Best Asian Restaurants Awards at Grand Hyatt Singapore.

The seventh edition of the annual Asian Masters, presented by Citibank Singapore, is jointly organised by Sphere Exhibits, a wholly owned subsidiary of Singapore Press Holdings, and F&B consultancy firm Poulouse Associates.

Also paying tribute to culinary heritage is the newly launched Delicacies Heirlooms book, which features 10 well-known family-run restaurants in Singapore. It is priced at \$30 and published by Straits Times Press.

Some of the establishments include Islamic Restaurant in North Bridge Road and Chinese restaurant Fatty Weng in Smith Street. The author, lawyer Ow Kim Kit, 43, tells the stories of how the families preserved their food legacies and stayed in business for decades. The Sunday Times speaks to three of the stalwart eateries featured – Ka-Soh (Swee Kee Fish Head Noodle House); nasi padang specialist Sabar Menanti; and Peranakan restaurant Guan Hoe Soon – about how they have kept going all these years.

euniceq@sph.com.sg

• Follow Eunice Quek on Twitter @ST_EuniceQ

Highlights at the Asian Masters



LIANHE ZAOBAO PRESENTS THE GLENDRONACH DINNER AT SPRING COURT WITH HANDPICKED WINES

What: Join Lianhe Zaobao food correspondent Ng Yimin as she hosts this dinner in celebration of Teochew Restaurant Huat Kee's 50th anniversary. The six-course feast – specially curated by Huat Kee's mother- and son team of Madam Loh Hock Eng and Mr Lee Chiang Howe – features dishes such as pomfret soup with taro, signature braised caramelised sea cucumber and 30-head abalone (above); and glazed pork belly with glutinous rice and mashed taro. The dishes are paired with whiskies from Scottish whisky distillery GlenDronach.

Where: Teochew Restaurant Huat Kee, 02-01 RELC Building, 30 Orange Grove Road
When: March 7, 7pm
Price: \$270++ and \$216++ (Citibank cards)



THE STRAITS TIMES PRESENTS A CELEBRATION DINNER AT SPRING COURT WITH HANDPICKED WINES

What: Hosted by The Straits Times senior food correspondent Wong Ah Yoke, this eight-course dinner at Chinese restaurant Spring Court features highlights such as traditional double-boiled bird's nest in whole chicken; crispy crabmeat roll with chicken liver and salted egg yolk with spicy salt fried button mushroom; barbecued whole boneless suckling pig with fermented bean paste; and roasted whole boneless chicken stuffed with minced prawn (above). The dinner is paired with wines from Australian wine company Handpicked Wines.

Where: Spring Court, 52-56 Upper Cross Street
When: March 12, 7pm
Price: \$213++ and \$170.40++ (Citibank cards)



A TASTE OF EXQUISITE MALAY CUISINE WITH AZIZA

What: Savour the finest of Malay cuisine by culinary doyenne Aziza Ali (above), known for her eponymous fine-dining restaurant on Emerald Hill, which ran for 24 years from 1979. Her menu at Grand Hyatt Singapore includes ayam panggang bersantan istimewa (grilled chicken breast sandwiched in grilled eggplant and tender lamb cooked in onions, tomatoes and mixed spices sauce with toasted almonds and mint leaves); and sambal kesum tasek (barramundi cooked in tamarind chilli spices, kesum leaves and topped with scallop).

Where: Grand Salon, Level 2 Grand Hyatt Singapore, 10 Scotts Road
When: March 19, 7pm
Price: \$118++ and \$94.40++ (Citibank cards)



AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR BRYAN KOH PRESENTS '0451MB: AN EVENING OF FOOD FROM HIS BOOKS', ACCOMPANIED BY WOODFORD RESERVE COCKTAILS

What: Cookbook author and cake business Chalk Farm co-founder Bryan Koh's (above) books come alive through his menu of Burmese food – made with recipes accumulated during his time in Myanmar. The menu features Mondit (Rakhine fish noodle soup with pounded green chilli sauce); Humba (pork belly with soya, vinegar and Saba bananas); Manuk Piaparen (Marano chicken curry); and Champuraddo (black rice and chocolate pudding with deep-fried mermaid fish).

Where: Auntie's Wok and Steam, Andaz Singapore, 5 Fraser Street
When: March 21, 7pm
Price: \$128++ and \$102.40++ (Citibank cards)

AN EVENING AT PERAMAKAN WITH VERAMONTE WINES

What: Savour a variety of classic Nonya dishes crafted by Peramakan's fourth-generation chef Kathryn Ho. Highlights include bakwan keeping soup (minced pork and crab meatball soup); babi tohaya (braised pork belly in red rice yeast); Nonya ayam buah keluak; nasi ulam (mixed herb rice, right); and Golden Coin Beef Rendang. The dishes are paired with Veramonte wines from Chile.

Where: Peramakan,



INFINITI PRESENTS A WORLD OF SPICE WITH JACK DANIEL'S AND WOODFORD RESERVE WHISKIES AT THE SONG OF INDIA

What: One-Michelin-starred fine-dining Indian restaurant The Song Of India pairs its dishes with premium bourbon from Woodford Reserve, Kentucky, as well as Jack Daniel's from Tennessee. Menu items include lobster porcini shorba (soup) served with chilli cheese khari stick; and Seafood Festa Art Palate (right), which includes Chettina prawn, Malvani mussels, Goan fish and crispy okra.



Where: The Song of India, 33 Scotts Road
When: March 6, 7pm
Price: \$108++ and \$86.40++ (Citibank cards)

PHOTOS: PERAMAKAN, SPRING COURT, ST FILE, TEOWCHEW RESTAURANT HUAT KEE, THE SONG OF INDIA

Old eateries and their heirloom dishes

KA-SOH (SWEET KEE FISH HEAD NOODLE HOUSE)

Heirloom dish: Fish head with black bean sauce (\$24)

Where: Sweet Kee Fish Head Noodle House, 96 Amoy Street, open: 11.30am to 2.30pm, 5.30 to 10pm daily, tel: 6224-9920; Ka-Soh, Alumni Medical Centre, 2 College Road, open: 11.30am to 2.30pm, 5.30 to 9.30pm daily, tel: 6473-6686
Info: ka-soh.com.sg

No shortcuts are taken when it comes to maintaining the quality of food at Ka-Soh and Sweet Kee Fish Head Noodle House.

Second-generation owner Tang Tat Cheong, 65, insists care is the key to the survival of the family business started by his father at Great World Amusement Park in 1939.

When it moved to a shophouse in Chin Chew Street in the mid-1950s, the Sweet Kee brand was established. By then, it was already known for its fish head noodles using snakehead fish as well as zi char dishes. It moved to its current premises in Amoy Street in 1997, when the Ka-Soh brand – named after Cantonese waitress Ka Soh Por, who used to work with the

family – was established.

Its sister outlet Ka-Soh, moved around several locations before settling 10 years ago at Singapore General Hospital's Alumni Medical Centre in College Road.

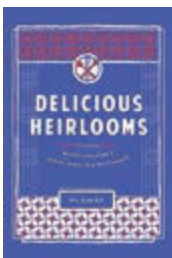
Sweet Kee Fish Head Noodle House is best known for its signature sliced fish noodle soup (from \$7.50), prawn paste chicken (from \$8) and pork ribs (from \$9.50). Its new outlet at Jewel Changi Airport will feature "a spin" on fish soup with the addition of prawn and crab, says Mr Tang's son Cedric, 34, Ka-Soh's marketing director. He has three siblings, aged 21 to 37, who also help out in the business.

Called Faai Di by Ka-Soh, the quick-service mini restaurant will be part of the Food Junction food-court and have its own seating area. The name is Cantonese for "hurry up". The menu is still in the works and the younger Mr Tang is focused on making sure the traditional flavours are retained.

On the brand's secret to longevity, the senior Mr Tang says: "Don't cheat and always use good quality ingredients. We also evolve and follow trends as people's dining patterns and taste buds are changing."



Ka-Soh owner Tang Tat Cheong and his son Cedric with its signature dish of fish head with black bean sauce. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



• To buy Delicious Heirlooms, go to stbooks.sg

SABAR MENANTI

Heirloom dishes: Ikan bakar (charcoal-grilled fish), beef rendang, ayam bakar (charcoal-grilled chicken) and the breakfast favourite, lontong (\$4.50). Nasi padang prices range from \$7 to \$10.

Where: 747 North Bridge Road, open: 7.30am to 4.30pm (Tuesdays to Sundays), closed on Mondays

Sabar Menanti, a household name for nasi padang, started as a push-cart business in the 1920s and is still well-loved today.

Business boomed in the 1940s when it supplied food to coal wholesalers in Kallang. It has fed the likes of late American celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain and local personalities such as former footballer Fandi Ahmad and comedian Nappi Ali. On weekends, tourists come by the busload.

It is now helmed by Ms Maryulis Bagindor Marlian, 65, whom her son Iszahar Tambunan says is "a force to be reckoned with", as she runs a tight ship to ensure a high standard of food.

Ms Maryulis, who took over the business from her parents, spe-



cialises in ikan bakar (charcoal-grilled fish), beef rendang, ayam bakar (charcoal-grilled chicken) and the breakfast favourite, lontong (\$4.50). Nasi padang prices range from \$7 to \$10.

Her sister runs Indonesian restau-

rant Rumah Makan Minang in Kandahar Street, while one of her brothers used to run Sabar Menanti 1 in Shenton Way, which closed in 2017 for government redevelopment. The flagship Sabar Menanti outlet in North Bridge Road was estab-

lished in the mid-1990s. Mr Iszahar, 39, a broker, hopes to franchise and expand the business, but notes the need to do it "tactfully".

"I have to ensure the food's consistent quality. And while I don't want my mother to stop working, I do want her to slow down. My involvement will tap the younger generation and the corporate crowd," adds Mr Iszahar, who runs Sabar Menanti on Sundays, with his seven-year-old twin children in tow to help out.

On its success so far, Ms Maryulis, who still goes to the market every day at 5.30am to pick the freshest fish, says: "It's about service and never stinting on ingredients."



Guan Hoe Soon's third-generation owner Jenny Yap with her husband Raymond and parents Mr and Mrs Yap Kow Soon. ST PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE

GUAN HOE SOON

Heirloom dish: Ayam buah keluak (right, from \$16.80)
Where: 38/40 Joo Chiat Place, open: 11am to 3pm, 6 to 9.30pm daily

Info: Call 6344-2761 or go to www.guanhoesoon.com

The Yap family behind Peranakan restaurant Guan Hoe Soon is actually Hainanese, not Peranakan.

But that has not stopped the establishment from dishes out Peranakan fare since 1953, thanks to its founder Yap Chee Kwee, who used to work as a housekeeper for a Peranakan family. He honed his skills and eventually set up a stall in Joo Chiat Road, from which he would cater for birthdays and weddings on the side.

The business has always remained in Joo Chiat, moving 10 years ago to its current location in Joo Chiat Place. It is now run by third-generation owner Jenny Yap, 53, whose husband Raymond, 57, is one of the chefs. He was trained by her father Yap Kow Soon, the founder's son.

Her eldest sister runs Straits Chinese Restaurant at Keck Seng Tower and her youngest brother runs Straits Chinese Nonya Restaurant in Craig Road.

Mr Yap, though semi-retired, is still very much involved in planning the menu for the Nonya outlet and hopes to reintroduce old dishes that have been lost over time.



He credits 2008 television drama The Little Nyonya for the revival in interest for Peranakan food and says: "We have to keep the standards up. Everything is cooked with fresh ingredients, diners can tell the difference. Recipes have never changed and remain traditional."

Ms Yap says: "Many of our regulars have eaten our food from when they were children, and now they bring their children. We have never done any advertising, just relied on word of mouth."

The recent surprise visit of American actress Brie Larson, who was in town to promote the new Captain Marvel film, put the spotlight on the restaurant as she featured its food in her Instagram stories.

When asked about it, Ms Yap beams and says she is proud that Larson enjoyed and finished the food served.

Calling it a "miracle" that the brand has survived for 66 years, she says the secret is generosity. "We never stint on the rempah."

White Restaurant, known for its humble dish, sets its sights on more outlets here and opening overseas



Tan Hsueh Yun
Food Editor

Legends, you would think, are forged with some ceremony. A low rumble at least.

Two bai mien or white beehoon, a humble dish Mr Tay King Huak made popular in Singapore, and which his son Victor, who runs the business now, is going to take to the world.

The story of bai mien began in 1998, quietly, in a hawker stall in Chong Pang. The older Mr Tay, now 73, had time on his hands after he gave up running a canteen stall selling economy rice. His brother was selling fried beehoon in that hawker centre and roped in Mr Tay's wife to help. He would pick her up from work and watch his brother cook the rice vermicelli.

A stall became vacant in the hawker centre and he and his wife, Madam Ang Ah Sol, now 71, decided to go for it and sell a version of the beehoon just as his brother was winding down his business. Mr Tay tinkered with the dish, figuring out how to maximise the flavour in the otherwise plain-looking noodles.

Just when he had the right formula, he had to vacate the stall because the hawker centre was due to be torn down. There was a break of a few months and then he was offered a stall in a corner coffee shop in Sembawang in 1999. He took it.

The business was not an immediate success, but the support of friends and word of mouth about the curiously named dish generated some buzz. More people started coming.

Then came the rave reviews. Then came the endless queues. Then came the copycats.

This year, the Tays celebrate the 20th anniversary of their business. It has grown to five restaurants. Aside from the original one in Jalan Tampang, there are branches in Punggol, Sembawang, Jurong and Toa Payoh. Restaurants would envy the business they generate. On average, a table turns 10 times through the day on a weekday, and 15 times a day on a weekend.

In April, they will open the sixth restaurant, a 2,000 sq ft one in Jewel Changi Airport, representing Singapore alongside other home-grown brands such as Violet On and Collin's.

Mr Victor Tay, 38, said: "The airports had approached us a few times. But we wanted to build our brand first. And now, Changi is the last stage before going international."

First, it will be franchised restaurants in South-east Asia, and then others farther afield.

He thinks his dad's beehoon is as iconic a dish as chilli crab, chicken rice and kaya toast.

"The history of our dish is not as long," he said. "But there are no debates about whether this dish is from Singapore or Malaysia. And that's what we hope it will become known as – a Singapore dish."

Bai mien, which he laments is difficult to photograph "because it's just white", is really a lot more than that.

Mr Tay senior said the stock is key. It is so key to the business that each of the restaurants has two chefs dedicated to cooking the dish.

Mr Tay, his wife and their son can cook it too. Until about five years ago, the couple were still cooking at the Jalan Tampang restaurant.

Mr Tay junior has also paid his dues, spending seven years in the kitchen as head chef after being trained by his mother.

Madam Ang said: "When he started, he didn't even know how to hold a ladle. I taught him when to turn the heat on and off, how to tell if the oil was hot enough, how to control the fire."

"He had to learn how to use his instincts. And it was months before he was allowed to cook a dish. He started by frying eggs and cooking staff meals."

The sort of training he received is similar to what new hires go through. The company has 160 staff and there are training programmes for service and kitchen staff as well as fresher courses.

All of this was formalised gradually after Mr Tay junior joined the family business in 2000. Two of his three older sisters help out too. He had been working at the restaurant while studying engineering in Nanyang Polytechnic and, during national service, clearing tables and

Taking white beehoon to the world



Mr Tay King Huak and his son Victor with their famous white beehoon dish. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSIUS CHERN

flattering that the dish is good enough for people to try and replicate."

Some of these versions are indeed fried with lard and come topped with crunchy cubes of pig fat and lala clams.

There are no claims in the original version and no lard. The noodles come with prawns, squid, vegetables, egg and calamansi limes to squeeze over the top. Diners have been known to queue two hours for the dish.

There is more on the menu, of course. Indonesian-style fried chicken rubbed with turmeric; hae cho, which are deep-fried meat and prawn rolls; sweet potato leaves fried with sambal belacan; and stir-fried fish head with bittergourd, among others.

But the bestseller by far is bai mien. It is so key to the business that each of the restaurants has two chefs dedicated to cooking the dish.

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All of this was formalised gradually after Mr Tay junior joined the family business in 2000. Two of his three older sisters help out too. He had been working at the restaurant while studying engineering in Nanyang Polytechnic and, during national service, clearing tables and

washing dishes. By his own account, he was rebellious, getting into fights, keeping bad company and smoking. He credits his wife Lauren, 34, for straightening him out. They have three kids aged four to 10.

Once immersed in the business, he saw the potential in it.

In 2003, the family started renting the entire coffee shop. The following year, they put up a large signboard which read Bai Mi Fen. The restaurant is called You Huak, but for many customers, the place is simply the name of its signature dish.

It was not until 2015, when the younger Mr Tay took over the business, that the family opened a second restaurant.

He said: "It was never in my dad's mind to expand the business. My parents are more conservative."

But some of their regular customers got married, moved to towns such as Punggol and Sengkang and urged them to open in those suburbs to save them travel time to get their beehoon.

They found a good location "by the seaside" and, in January 2015, opened a 160-seat restaurant in Punggol.

"We were not prepared for the crowd that came to support us," said the younger Mr Tay.

"My wife gets emotional when we go there, because she opened the branch with me. The first two weeks were the worst time of my life. We didn't have enough staff, we had to handle suppliers and everything, but has a curious name and is not quite ubiquitous. Yet it is also accessible, a casual dish people can eat every day."

Mr Tay senior shakes his head when asked if he could have envisioned all of this when he was tinkering with the beehoon recipe all those years ago. He is proud of what his son has done, that much is clear.

"He has the brains. If it had been up to me, one outlet would be enough."

The chicken stock, hae cho, sauces and marinated meats are prepared there and sent to the restaurants, but all dishes are cooked and finished on-site.

Mr Tay is looking to open one more White Restaurant in Singapore, in the southern district.

But he has more ambitious plans. A chain of "express" outlets is one of them – smaller spaces offering takeaways and bento meals featuring White's most popular dishes at lower prices to the Central Business District crowd and for office events.

There are also plans to sell White's hae cho in the restaurants by next month. Customers have been buying the meat and prawn rolls to take home for years. These will now be packaged and frozen. All customers will need to do is thaw the rolls and then deep-fry or air-fry them.

Research and development is ongoing to bottle White's chilli sauces. He added that the company is putting together franchise kits for plans to expand overseas in two to three years. The company is looking at Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines first.

"Going into an unknown market is quite daunting," he said about choosing the franchise model, adding that only "genuine partners" need apply.

After South-east Asia, he is eyeing China and its huge market.

The advantage he has is that bai mien is both mass and niche – it is inexpensive, but has a curious name and is not quite ubiquitous. Yet it is also accessible, a casual dish people can eat every day."

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"He has the brains. If it had been up to me, one outlet would be enough."

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Veal Tartare "os a moelle" (left), the mushroom dip that appears to burst into a ring of fire (above) and Apple (right), a palate cleanser that looks like a glass apple but is actually a sorbet with chocolate pips. PHOTOS: RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA, WONG AH YOKE



Restaurant Review

Visual surprises add drama

Things are not what they seem at RWS' latest celebrity restaurant, adding magic to some dishes



Wong Ah Yoke
Senior Food Correspondent

Table65, the two-month-old restaurant by Dutch chef Richard van Oostenbrugge, has quite a bit of expectations to live up to. It is Resorts World Sentosa's latest celebrity restaurant and takes over the space vacated by Restaurant de Joel Robuchon, the only three-Michelin-starred restaurant here which closed last year. But Table65, which takes its name from Singapore's country code, cannot be more different from its predecessor. For starters, the space is totally transformed. Gone are the Baccarat crystal chandeliers and bread trolleys, as well as the garden wall. Instead, you enter through a sloped walkway into a dimly-lit room where an open stainless steel kitchen takes centre stage. A U-shaped counter runs around the kitchen on three sides, but seats are placed only in front. On the sides are tables for groups of four and more on elevated platforms. There is also a private room that

seats 12 people. Chef van Oostenbrugge owns 212 in Amsterdam with business partner and chef Thomas Groot, which is known for its experiential dining. And like that restaurant, which is named after an area code in New York's Manhattan, dinner at Table65 is not just about the food. Instead, it springs occasional visual surprises on the diner and things may not be what they seem. For dinner, you get to choose from a \$148 five-course menu or a \$218 eight-course menu, or go a la carte. If it's your first visit and your budget allows it, I'd say go for the eight courses for the full experience. The fun begins with the first item on the table – a mushroom dip to accompany squiggly-shaped shiitake pizza bites. Without warning, the rim of the dish appears to burst into flames, but nothing is burnt. The ring of fire is a light projection, but it looks impressive. After that little drama, dinner begins with a trio of amuse bouche – cold-smoked horse mackerel and passion fruit ceviche; jelly of tomato consommé with lovage oil and marinated anchovy; and cured mackerel with quinoa real and tomato-strawberry vinaigrette. These little bites have two things in common – they taste good and their acidity wakes up the appetite. And you appreciate that because the first starter that comes next is, oddly, a very heavy dish. Called "os a moelle", which is French for bone marrow, it looks like a typical dish of baked marrow served in a shank bone. But the bone is fashioned out of jellified smoked herring, with its hollowed



centre stuffed with veal tartare. A crème fraîche sauce made with actual marrow and clams is drizzled over it and, at the table, the tartare is topped with Beluga caviar. I eat up everything and it's delicious, but it's a big serving heavy with fat. So when I put down my fork, I'm already half full. Because of that, I don't complain when the next course, ravioli of Belon oyster, comes with just two pieces of pasta – even though I love oysters and this is my favourite dish. The shellfish provides the dominant flavour, but the acidity from smoked lemon puree lightens the dish. The ravioli is covered in a foamy sauce made with veal shank and seasoned with shellfish juice and oyster puree, so yummy that you want to slurp it up. Two other seafood courses follow: Mozambique langoustine poached in duck fat; and poached turbot in a stock made with chicken and smoked eel, with a hint of oxidised smoked wine and showered with

black truffle shaved at the table. Both dishes are good, and the turbot – which was bland during an earlier dinner I was invited to – is better the second time around. The smoked eel stock is excellent both times though. For the meat course, you get to choose between A5 Ohmi wagyu and Toh Thye San duck. I pick the duck to see how the poultry raised on a farm in Johor by a Singapore company fares. Also, the wagyu comes with a hefty \$70 supplement. The duck passes muster. The piece of breast is roasted over charcoal until it is pink and juicy inside, then glazed and served with mole shavings and a sauce made with duck liver. Magic is worked again with Apple, a palate cleanser that chef van Oostenbrugge is famous for, and justifiably so. What appears at the table looks like a glass apple with a real core inside, but isn't. That incredibly

TABLE65
Hotel Michael, Level 1
(opposite Lake of Dreams),
Resorts World Sentosa,
tel: 6577-7939
Open: 6 to 10.30pm (Thursdays
to Mondays)

Food: ★★★★★
Service: ★★★★★
Ambience: ★★★★★
Price: From \$148 a person,
without drinks

thin piece of glass is sugar and the core is Granny Smith sorbet with chocolate pips. It stands on a crispy pastry ring filled with pieces of apple poached in ginger syrup and a touch of salted caramel. The sad thing is that you have to destroy this work of art to enjoy it. Dessert is Kumquat, which comprises the citrus fruit in a consommé of tangerine and honey and topped with rosemary foam frozen in liquid nitrogen. It is refreshing with just the right balance of sweetness and tartness, and despite the heavy start of the meal, I leave with a spring in my step.

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Follow Wong Ah Yoke on Instagram @wongahyoke

The Sunday Times paid for its meals at the eateries reviewed here.

Cheap & Good

Crispy, flaky, buttery prata



Yip Wai Yee

Good things come to those who wait, and I would gladly wait my turn to get some of that wonderfully crispy roti prata from Chindamani Indian Restaurant. Despite the name, Chindamani is more like a coffee shop food stall, with outlets located in various heartland neighbourhoods, such as in Clementi and Bishan. I go to the one at Hougang Avenue 1 and although it is hidden

deep within a block of flats, there is a steady stream of customers. I visit the stall on a relatively quiet weekday morning to avoid the crowds but, even then, I have to wait at least 10 minutes to get my order of their signature crispy roti prata. Every piece of prata is made to order, and boy, is the wait well worth it. As with most prata stalls, the place offers a diverse variety of toppings, such as cheese, onion or the sweet option of banana. My favourite is the plain prata (\$1 per piece), as this is how you get to taste it at its crispiest. Fans of the usual doughier type of prata will not enjoy this version. Every piece of prata, served in a folded square shape, is so thin that the centre is almost translucent. It



The signature crispy roti prata, which is made to order, is so thin that the centre is almost translucent. ST PHOTO: YIP WAI YEE

is similar to the typical tissue prata, but it is flakier and more buttery. Paired with the stall's robust fish-curry gravy, it is a satisfying snack. The only downside is that because the prata is so thin, it is not

very filling, so do order at least two or three pieces per person. For a slightly heartier meal, get the prata plaster (\$1.50), which comes with a runny egg. The prata remains crispy even after the egg

yolk is broken and flows all over. The stall also offers other dishes such as thosai, roti john and murtaba. But almost every customer I see is having the crispy prata.

CHINDAMANI INDIAN RESTAURANT
01-1346, 121 Hougang Avenue 1
Open: 6.30am to 11pm daily
Rating: ★★★★★